The RING

SHOBOX | THE NEW GENERATION

20TH ANNIVERSARY

COMMEMORATIVE ISSUE

A SHOWTIME SPORTS DOCUMENTARY

THE KINGS

4-PART SERIES PREMIERES
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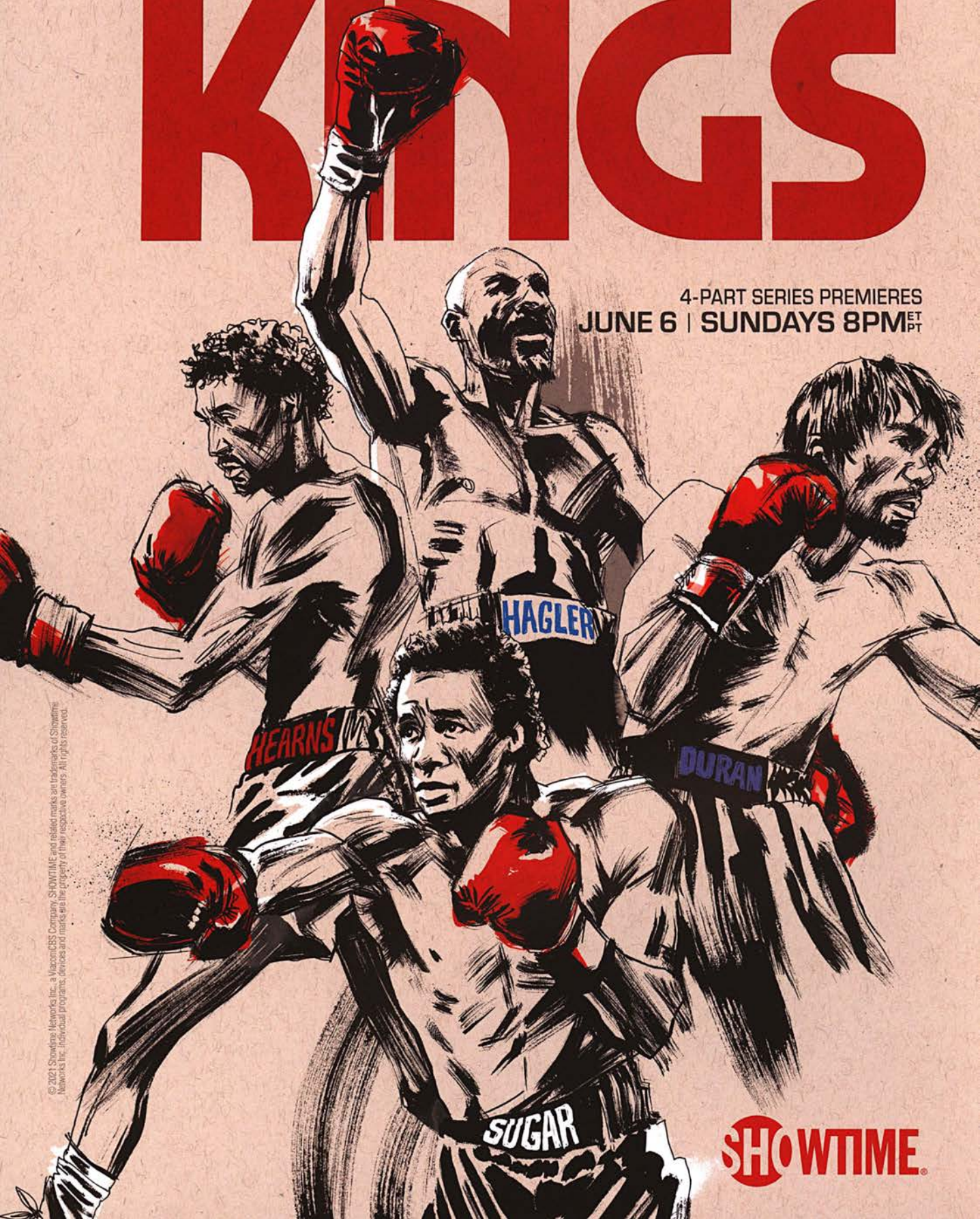

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SHOBOX 20TH ANNIVERSARY

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COVER: DAMIAN SZCZEPARA - ART DIRECTOR / ASHLEY AYAZ - PRODUCER

The relentless pressure of then-unknown Romanian slugger Leonard Dorin prevailed against fellow unbeaten prospect Martin O'Malley in the main event of the inaugural *ShoBox: The New Generation* on July 21, 2001. Dorin's grit and determination would carry him to a lightweight world title six months later.

FIGHTERS COME OUT WRITING

Devon Alexander

Former two-division world champion; fought on *ShoBox* twice (2007 and 2009)

"*ShoBox* brings out the best in young fighters. It gives us confidence in ourselves. It allows us to get out there and do our best. *ShoBox* is an important aspect of boxing nowadays because everybody watches ShoBox. I still watch *ShoBox*. They put on awesome cards. I came from *ShoBox*. It's very important for the world to see up-and-coming fighters who are going to be future world champions of boxing, and *ShoBox* has definitely helped a tremendous amount of fighters."

Timothy Bradley

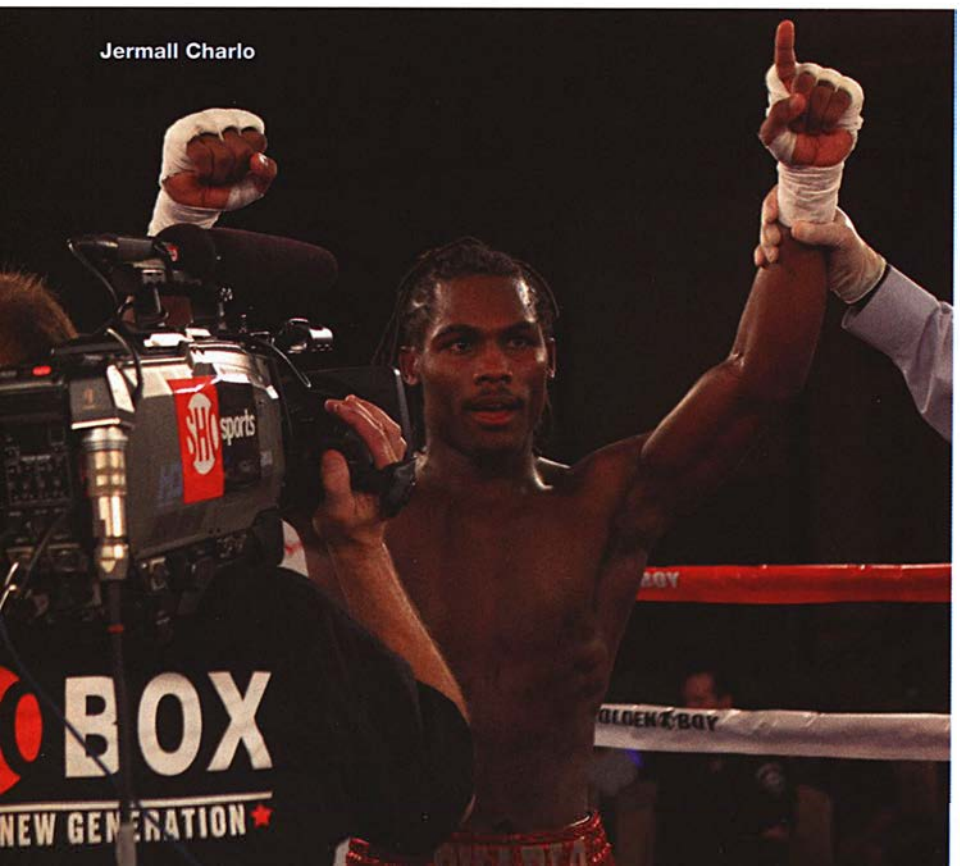
Former two-division world champion; fought on *ShoBox* four times (2006, 2007 twice, 2008)

"*ShoBox* is going to take prospects to contenders, but it goes past contenders. *ShoBox* takes prospects and turns them into world champions. I'm telling you. It's been proven – Ricky Hatton, Chad Dawson, me. I won my first world title on *ShoBox*. Not only do they make prospects and turn them into contenders but they turn these contenders into world champions. You need that. You have to have that platform as a young fighter. You've got to be groomed. They match you up tough. They don't match you up with a nobody. They match you with a guy who can fight. It's a different level on *ShoBox* and it will get you ready for the big leagues."

Jermall Charlo

WBC middleweight world champion; fought on *ShoBox* once (2013)

"I just remember how enthused I was by Deontay Wilder being the main event that night. We both were on *ShoBox* together on the same night and I knew we would both be great sooner or later. We both scored KOs and I absolutely love that fight (a second-round KO of Antwone Smith). To me, it was the start of stardom. I love to watch *ShoBox* because the series shows me what's up next. Sometimes, you can even see some opponents that might be in my future. I also love the announcing crew. I got a chance to train with Raul Marquez. When I was young, I used to see Raul training with Ronnie Shields out in Houston. And Steve Farhood, I just like his commentating. It's a show that I always like to tune in to watch, and I've even got my kids to start watching *ShoBox*."



Jermall Charlo

Chad Dawson

Former two-time light heavyweight world champion; fought on *ShoBox* two times (2005 and 2006)

"*ShoBox* helped with my career because I got to be on national TV. After the Eric Harding fight, you wouldn't believe how many people knew who I was after that fight. I started to develop a fanbase. People knew who I was. We got a call after the Harding fight to fight for a world title. I was like, 'Wow.' If it wasn't for *ShoBox*, I wouldn't have gotten that fight. I wouldn't have won that title that night and I wouldn't be where I am at right now."

Robert Guerrero

Former two-division world champion; fought on *ShoBox* five times (2004, 2005 twice, 2006, 2008)

"When you're on *ShoBox*, they don't just put guys in front of you to take out. You know you're fighting well-matched fights that are going to make you a better fighter, that are going to build you. You're going to learn and get that experience. As everybody knows, I got my first loss on *ShoBox*. I came back a better fighter. Stronger. Faster. I came back and got it done. It really builds your confidence and your character to become a better fighter."

Ricky Hatton

Former two-division world champion; fought on *ShoBox* three times (2001 twice, 2002)

"A lot of people remember me for the big fights – the Kostya Tszyu, the Mayweather fights and all the others, the Castillo fights. I think *ShoBox*, while they didn't make me a household name, they made me a name in the fact that even before my chance came against Kostya Tszyu, which was my ultimate, main fight, I think the American audience knew of me, which makes a big difference. Instead of it being Kostya Tszyu against some kid from England, it was Kostya Tszyu vs. Ricky Hatton, so fighting on *ShoBox* put me in the limelight."

Ricky Hatton's U.S. television debut was on *ShoBox*.

Brandun Lee

Undefeated junior welterweight prospect; has fought on *ShoBox* four times, so far (2019, 2020 twice, 2021)

"Fighting on *ShoBox* has meant everything to me so far in my career. I'm very aware of the guys that came before me who have fought on *ShoBox*, like Timothy Bradley, and I've seen where those guys have been able to take their careers. It's a path that I want to follow, and *ShoBox* is just the beginning. It's also been really cool to see my following on social media continue to grow each time I fight. I feel like fighting on national TV has helped me grow my name in the boxing world, and I like the way SHOWTIME has supported me since the beginning."

Shawn Porter

Former two-time welterweight world champion; fought on *ShoBox* four times (2009 and 2010 three times)

"*ShoBox* has given young fighters like myself an avenue that most fighters don't get. For us Olympians and us young fighters that have big aspirations in this sport, it has given us an avenue that has allowed us to showcase what we have and gives us an opportunity to be on a bigger, larger stage."

Gary Russell Jr.

Featherweight world champion; fought on *ShoBox* three times (2009, 2012 twice)

"It was definitely a goal of mine to fight on *ShoBox*. The reason why is, once again, it goes back to exposure. To give people that don't know about you the opportunity to see exactly what the product is. *ShoBox* gave me that opportunity."

Ishe Smith

Former junior middleweight world champion; fought on *ShoBox* five times (2003 twice, 2004, 2008, 2010)

"I would define a *ShoBox* fighter, a real *ShoBox* fighter, as one who is willing to take risks. A risk-taker that knows what is at stake. *ShoBox* to me isn't about money or how much you are making. It's a platform to get your name out there. You are going to be seen by the world. It's about stepping up and making good fights and taking risks. You got to be a risk-taker, and that's one thing I love. I love watching great fights, and I know *ShoBox* is going to give me that. I hate seeing mismatches on television, especially when a fighter is too good to be in a mismatch. Because once you have a certain amount of fights, you need to fight good fighters. I know with *ShoBox* you are going to get that."

Andre Ward

Former super middleweight and light heavyweight world champion; fought on *ShoBox* five times (2007, 2008, 2009 three times)

"I'm grateful for my time on *ShoBox* (when I was) coming up. I'm proud to be one of the many alumni on the network. *ShoBox* has been a springboard for a lot of great careers in the sport of boxing. I'm thankful that my career was one of them."

SHOWTIME BOXING

SHOBOX | THE NEW GENERATION

20TH ANNIVERSARY

TWO DECADES OF TOMORROW'S CHAMPIONS

SHOWTIME

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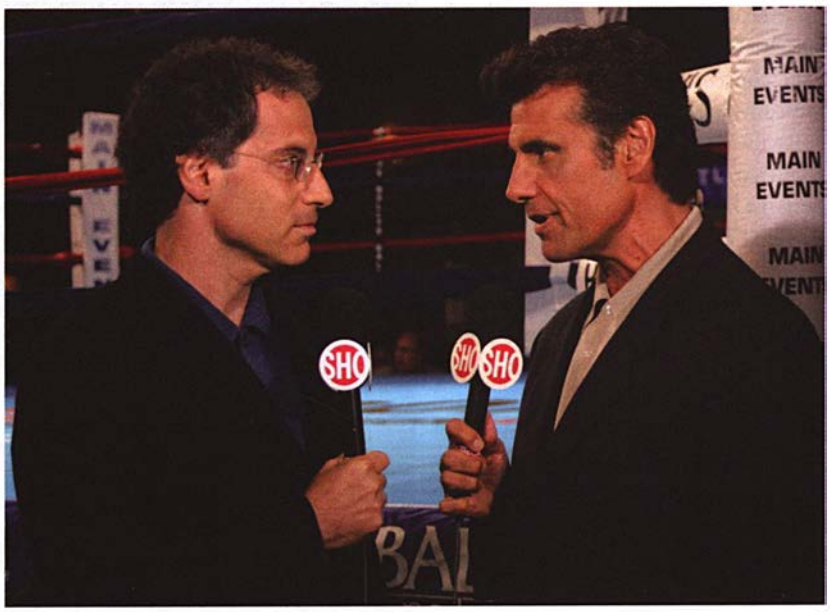
SHOWTIME BOXING

RINGSIDE BY STEVE FARHOOD

TWENTY YEARS AND COUNTING... SHOBOX CONTINUES TO FORGE BOXING'S NEW GENERATION



Nick Charles was the perfect broadcast partner during Farhood's early commentary career – and his best friend.

It was Saturday, July 21, 2001, and as 5 p.m. approached, I had one concern: Silly as it might seem, I was worried that my microphone would pick up the pounding of my heartbeat, which to me sounded like a bass drum.

I had worked lots of live television before, but this was different; this was the first broadcast of a new SHOWTIME series called *ShoBox*, and standing ringside at Bally's in Atlantic City, I was flat-out nervous.

Fortunately, I had a pro's pro in Nick Charles right next to me, and once we intro'd the show and teased the Leo Dorin-Martin O'Malley main event, I was OK.

Nick gave *ShoBox* instant credibility, and the show, featuring prospects matched tough, instantly filled a void.

Twenty years later, *ShoBox* rolls on.

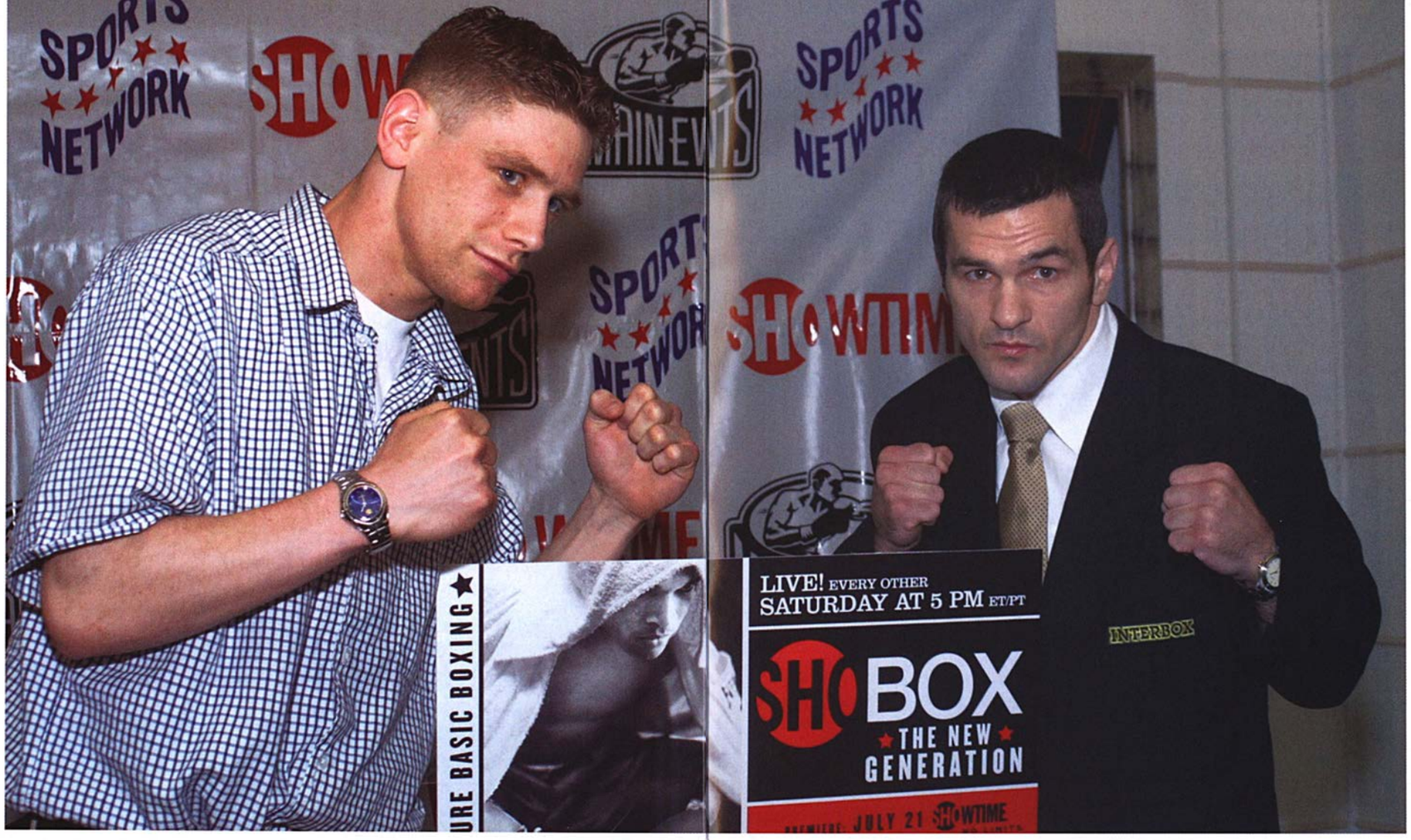
When Dougie Fischer asked me to be Guest Editor for this special issue of The Ring, I was struck by a wave of memories. That's because I had served as editor-in-chief of the magazine from 1989 to 1997. The Ring turns 100 next year, and over the course of 99 years, there have been only eight editors-in-chief. The magazine is more closely associated with boxing than anything else you can think of, and my tenure at the helm is, of course, among the highlights of my career.

The last front-of-the-magazine editorial I wrote for The Ring was in the December 1997 issue, my last as editor. It was a long time ago; some of the fighters I wrote about were Smokin' Bert Cooper, Johnny Tapia and Montell Griffin.

Toward the end of 1997, my time with The Ring was up. And *ShoBox* was still more than four years from its birth.

One memory stands out more than most others – and offers symmetry that has been 24 years in the making. Only a handful of issues before my departure, I accepted a freelance article from a young Los Angeles-based writer whom I didn't know. The article was titled "'Sugar' Shane Mosley: Wait Till You Get A Taste Of This Lightweight!"

The writer was Dougie Fischer.



The first *ShoBox* main event – Martin O'Malley (left) vs. Leonard Dorin – epitomized the series' credo: matching prospects tough.

SHOWTIME BOXING

***ShoBox* was the idea of then-**SHOWTIME boxing boss Jay Larkin and promoters Gary Shaw, who was running Main Events at the time, and England's Frank Warren. Larkin immediately handed over the reigns to executive producer Gordon Hall, and Rich Gaughan and Rick Phillips were chosen as producer and director, respectively.

By television standards, it's remarkable that two decades later, the Core Four of Hall, Gaughan, Phillips and Farhood remains in place.

For the four of us, I've always believed that what distinguishes the show is both pride and ownership – pride in the quality and success of the show, and ownership in this sense:

– For years, Hall had worked at SHOWTIME in various capacities, but *ShoBox* was his first opportunity to develop and lead a series of his own.

– A protégé of Showtime executive producer David Dinkins Jr., Gaughan had come through the ranks as well, and had already produced several SHOWTIME boxing broadcasts. This, however, was the first show that was his to produce – and his alone.

– Similarly, Phillips was a veteran director, but this was the first series that would reflect his style and keen eye.

– And while I had worked as an analyst for every level from public access television to ESPN, CNN and SHOWTIME (a pair of shows in the early '90s), *ShoBox* was also my first chance to place a personal imprint on a series.

In our *ShoBox* years, Gordon, Rich, Rick and I have worked under three bosses: Larkin, Ken Hershman and our current leader, Stephen Espinoza. We've seen the passing of not only parents, but colleagues. We've celebrated the births of not only children, but grandchildren.

Our allegiances are not only to SHOWTIME, but to each other.

My audition came in June 2001, at Mohegan Sun in Connecticut, where Kostya Tszyu was fighting Oktay Urkal. Having Nick at my side gave me confidence. Nonetheless, when Larkin and Hall decided to hire a 44-year-old boxing writer with a receding hairline, a decidedly Lebanese nose and an instantly recognizable New York accent, I was surprised.

And thrilled.

Nick, with whom I had previously worked as a boxing correspondent for CNN, piloted the *ShoBox* broadcasts for the first nine years. We became best friends, and when he died of cancer in 2011, the loss was immeasurable both personally and professionally.

That I've had the pleasure and honor of working for the past nine years with another broadcasting master, Barry Tompkins, and former world champ Raul Marquez, underlines my good fortune.

Nick and Barry offered very different approaches. Nick had never called fights before, while Barry has done blow-by-blow for many of the biggest fights in history. Nick was intense, while Barry is relaxed. They shared one thing with me: a love and appreciation for the written word.

But back to the beginning …

Six months after defeating O'Malley in that first main event, Dorin won a version of the world lightweight title. That became a familiar formula: As of this writing, 84 boxers have fought on *ShoBox* and gone on to become world titlists. Another 82 have unsuccessfully challenged for a world title. That means that on average, on 64 percent of our shows, viewers are watching one or more prospects who will at least advance to a world title opportunity.

And maybe the most revealing stat of all: More than 200 fighters have suffered their first career loss on *ShoBox*. Fittingly, the very first came on our very first show, when O'Malley, who was 17-0, lost to Dorin.

Some things have changed, of course. In the early days, we generally aired two fights per show. Now we feature three or four. Over the course of 20 years, our time slot has moved from Saturday afternoons to Thursday nights, to a long run on Friday nights, and in 2020, to Wednesday nights (thank you, pandemic).

Another change: The fights remain eight and 10 rounds, but the flights have gotten shorter. In the first few years, we made regular stops throughout the U.K., where we provided Ricky Hatton, Carl Froch, and Tyson Fury, among others, with their initial U.S. TV exposure. And over the years, several promoters joined Main Events and Warren in providing content. To date, at least 40 different promoters have worked with Hall in putting on *ShoBox* shows.

The ride hasn't always been smooth. When I think about *ShoBox's* infancy, I recall a show we did in October 2002 in Tampa, Florida. Going in, we had reason to believe it might've been our final broadcast. But Larkin promised us we'd be back, and he kept his word. Six months later, we were indeed back – this time for good.

Once we established a rhythm, we mostly stuck to our mission statement: Test young fighters with demanding opposition, which either exposes prospects or allows them to advance and grow. It's a simple premise, yet it hadn't been tried before, and hasn't been copied since. That, I believe, says a lot.

One thing Hall discovered early in the process was that it was beneficial to the fighters, promoters and viewers to provide deserving prospects with multiple appearances. Some, like Andre Ward and Timothy Bradley, took full advantage and improved before advancing to contender status and then world champion.

The value of repeat appearances was evident with Bradley, who in his first *ShoBox* fight clearly won on points against a difficult southpaw named Jaime Rangel but didn't seem particularly special. Bradley looked better in subsequent fights, and a year and a half after having struggled against Rangel, he became the first fighter to win a world title on *ShoBox*.

Now he appears headed to the International Boxing Hall of Fame.

Also thankful for repeat opportunities on *ShoBox* was Kermit Cintron, who froze up in his national TV debut and still went on to win a world title.

Then there's Ishe Smith, who remains the fighter I most closely associate with *ShoBox*. Smith went from unbeaten prospect on *ShoBox* to contestant on *The Contender* to *ShoBox* returnee. When, at the relatively late age of 34, he won a portion of the world title on SHOWTIME, loyalty on both sides had been rewarded.

Ideally, a prospect grows on *ShoBox* and then graduates to contender status. When that happens, it makes Hall feel like a proud parent. Some examples: Ward defeating Edison Miranda, Chad Dawson besting Eric Harding, and more recently, Regis Prograis stopping Joel Diaz Jr.

Other prospects reach a certain level and flatten out. Examples from the early days include Sechew Powell, Ebo Elder, Emmanuel Lucero and Rico Hoye. Good fighters all, but they fell short when making that final step.

Twenty years is a long time, but I still get pumped for the shows. Working on live television remains invigorating, and if you like boxing, how could you not be excited watching the development of a Devin Haney or a "Boots" Ennis or a Brandun Lee?

Over the past two decades, the needs of legitimate prospects haven't changed. Young fighters need steady work, reasonably tough opposition and the exposure provided by appearances on national TV.

The places of *ShoBox* and The Ring are secure, and I've been fortunate to have been a small part of both.

I hope you enjoy this special issue.

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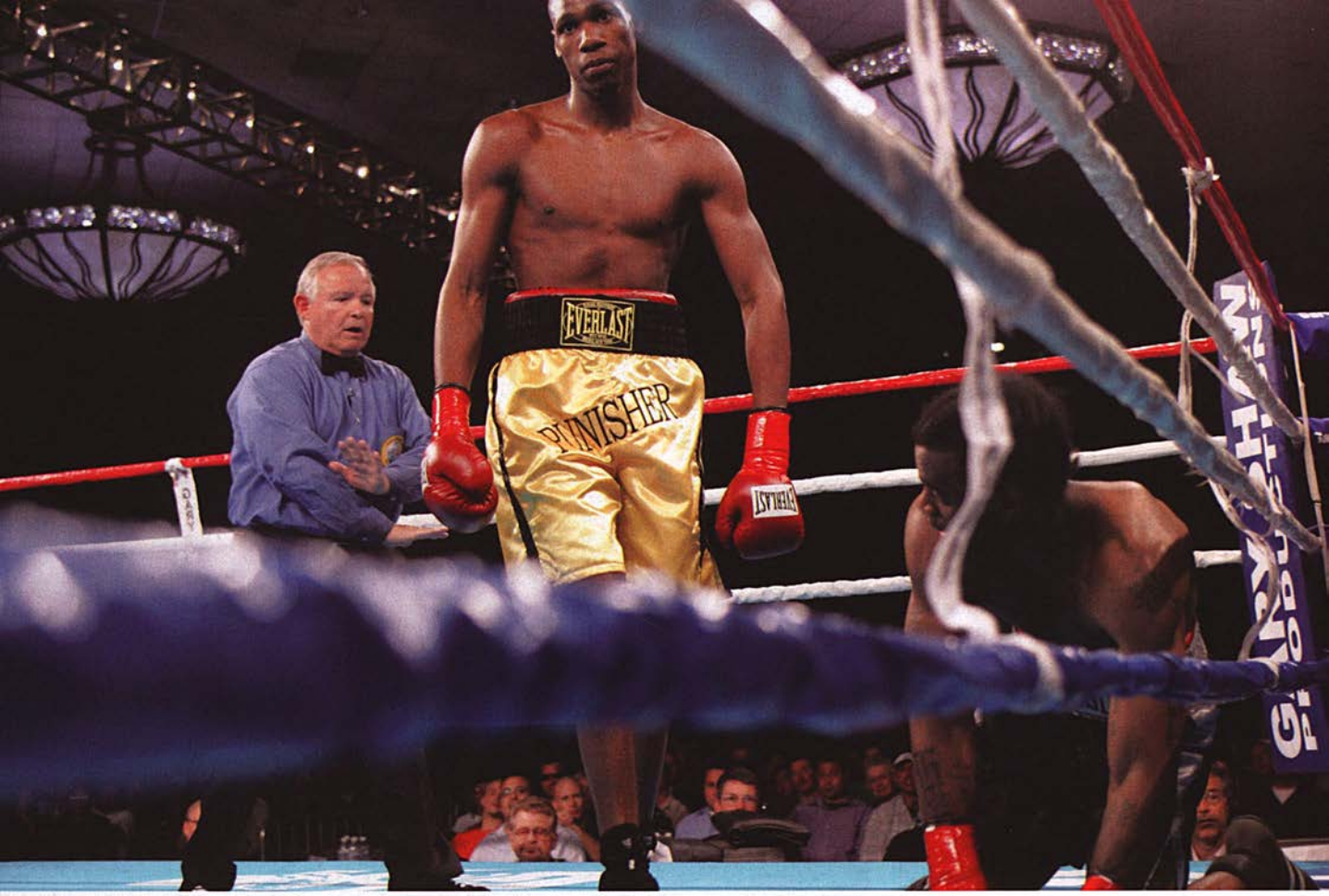


BEYOND THE GARDEN

By **Bernard Fernandez**

SHOBOX FORGOES BIG-NAME VENUES IN FAVOR OF BRINGING QUALITY FIGHTS TO OUT-OF-THE-WAY LOCATIONS

(Above) Paul Williams would go on to headline major cards in Las Vegas and Atlantic City, but he was in Santa Ynez, California, the night he dominated Terrance Cauthen to a 10-round decision on *ShoBox*.

For the most part, the key team members responsible for the 20 years (and counting) of *ShoBox: The New Generation* depart from major metropolitan areas, eventually coming together at venues well off the beaten track. Because of the travel requirements of their profession, announcers Steve Farhood (New York City), Barry Tompkins (San Francisco) and Raul Marquez (Houston) not only are frequent fliers, but regular customers at rental-car counters throughout America. The same might be said of *ShoBox's* longtime executive producer, Gordon Hall, and such similarly veteran staffers as producer Rich Gaughan and director Rick Phillips, all of whom also have become quite fond of taking the path less traveled.

There is so much more to these United States to see and experience than large cities with multiple big-time professional sports franchises.

"Two flights and an hour-and-a-half drive to get to the site is common," Farhood, who has been involved with *ShoBox* since its initial 2001 telecast, said of getting to where he needs to be to call a fight. "And, in its own way, we cherish that.

"The variety of locations is what distinguishes *ShoBox* from other boxing series. When I say we do shows in Miami, it's generally Miami, Oklahoma, not Miami, Florida. We have done shows in Philadelphia, Mississippi, as well as

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania."

All right, so *ShoBox* – created two decades ago and sustained in the belief that young, emerging boxers need to be tested tough and introduced to wider audiences in 50/50 fights on national television – hasn't played Madison Square Garden and isn't likely to, moving forward. But even Broadway's most successful and longest-running plays frequently open in out-of-the-way places, the better to iron out any wrinkles that might arise and to gauge audience reaction. If a stage production plays well in Peoria, or wherever, it's reasonable to assume it'll also find its niche in the Big Apple, Chicago, Los Angeles, Philadelphia or anywhere else that assumes an air of municipal superiority based primarily on population.

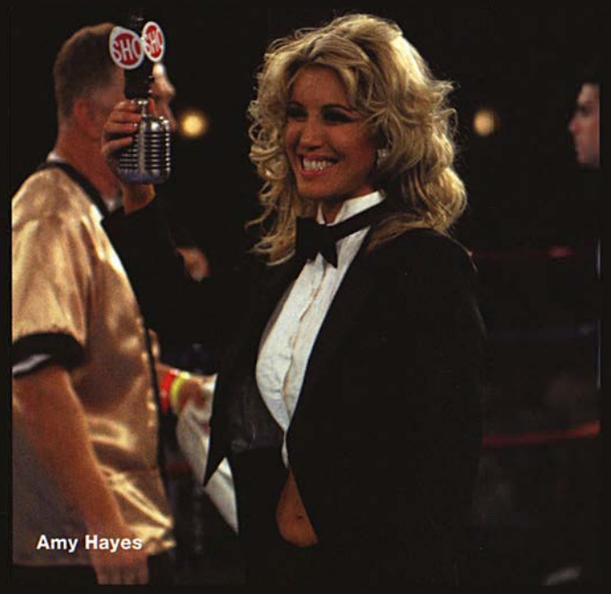
In its own way, *ShoBox's* appeal is rooted to some degree in its attachment to smaller towns. It's not a surprise that the National Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown (with a population of less than 2,000), and the International Boxing Hall of Fame in Canastota (roughly 4,000) are happily ensconced in central New York hamlets.

"You can get hooked," said Aaron Pryor, the great two-time junior welterweight titleholder who was 11 days shy of his 61st birthday when he passed away on October 9, 2016, on the occasion of still another of his annual visits to Canastota. "If you come here once, you're probably going to want to come year after year after year. To me, it's one of the greatest feelings you could ever have to come to this special place. I look forward to it like a little kid looks forward to Christmas. The fans here just take you in. They *embrace* you.

"If the Hall of Fame was in, say, New York City, I don't think it would feel the same. Too many different things to do or see there. Here, it's all about boxing for these four days."

For Farhood, the undisputed champion of places *ShoBox* has traveled to is the Chumash Casino in Santa Ynez, California, site of 33 telecasts, far ahead of the Buffalo Run Casino in Miami, Oklahoma, which is second with 11 such events. For those without a Road Atlas, Santa Ynez is 125 miles north of Los Angeles and

Vic Darchinyan defended his WBA 115-pound title vs. Rodrigo Guerrero in Rancho Mirage, California.

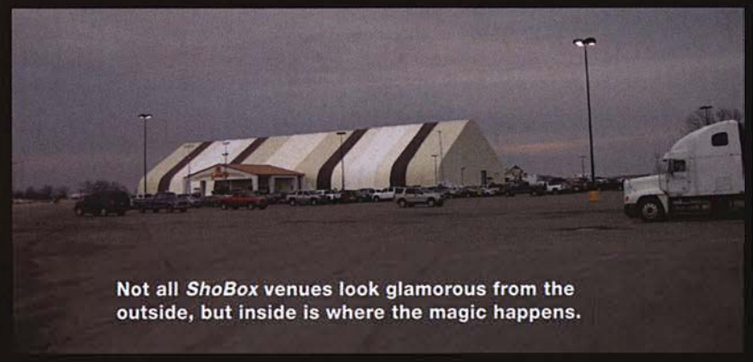


Amy Hayes

BOXING IN THE HEART OF AMERICA

SHOBOX HAS VISITED TOWNS IN 29 STATES DURING ITS 20-YEAR HISTORY.

CHUMASH CASINO, SANTA YNEZ, CA 33 • BUFFALO RUN CASINO, MIAMI, OKLA 11 • FANTASY SPRINGS, INDIO, CA 9 • BALLY'S, ATLANTIC CITY, NJ 9 • PECHANGA CASINO, TEMECULA, CA 6 • TURNING STONE CASINO, VERONA, NY 6 • FOXWOODS, MASHANTUCKET, CT 5 • HARD ROCK CASINO, LAS VEGAS, NV 5 • WINNAVEGAS CASINO, SLOAN, IOWA 5 • PALACE INDIAN CASINO/ TACHI CASINO, LEMOORE, CA 5 • GRAND CASINO, HINCKLEY, MN 5 • MOHEGAN SUN, UNCASVILLE, CT 5 • YORK HALL, LONDON, ENGLAND 4 • EMERALD QUEEN CASINO, TACOMA, WA 4 • SAM'S TOWN, LAS VEGAS, NV 4 • BUFFALO BILL'S CASINO, PRIMM, NEVADA 4 •



Not all *ShoBox* venues look glamorous from the outside, but inside is where the magic happens.

KEWADIN CASINO, SAULT STE MARIE, MICHIGAN 3 • BOARDWALK HALL, ATLANTIC CITY, NJ 3 • M.E.N. ARENA, MANCHESTER, ENGLAND 3 • LITTLE CREEK CASINO, SHELTON, WA 3 • BEAU RIVAGE CASINO, BILOXI, MS 3 • MORONGO CASINO, CABAZON, CA 3 • OMEGA INTERNATIONAL ARENA, CORONA, CA 3 • TEXAS STATION, LAS VEGAS, NV 3 • MOUNTAINEER RACE TRACK, CHESTER, WV 2 • SOBOBA CASINO, SAN JACINTO, CA 2 • KINGSWAY SPORT CENTRE, WIDNES, ENGLAND 2 • GORESBROOK LEISURE CENTRE, LONDON, ENGLAND 2 • DESOTO CIVIC CENTER, SOUTHAVEN, MISS 2 • CASINO DEL SOL, TUCSON, AZ 2 • PALMS, LAS VEGAS, NV 2 • LUCKY STAR CASINO, CONCHO, OKLA 2 • BELL CENTRE, MONTREAL, CANADA 2 • SPORTS CENTER OF LV, LAS VEGAS, NV 2 • DOWNTOWN LV SPORTS CENTER, LAS VEGAS, NV 2 • MGM GRAND, DETROIT, MICH 2 • AVIATOR ARENA, BROOKLYN, NY 2 • WICOMICO YOUTH CENTER, SALISBURY, MD 2 • LAREDEO ENTERTAINMENT CENTER/ LAREDO ENERGY ARENA, LAREDO, TEXAS 2

296 miles south of San Francisco.

"We went there four times a year for eight years straight," Farhood said, a bit wistfully in acknowledging that it's been a while since he and his *ShoBox* crew have appeared someplace that had become a sort of home away from home. "We stayed in the same Marriott every time. We got to know everybody there that went to the fights. We got to know the round-card girls, the restaurant employees. We loved it, and we miss it terribly."

Other occasional stops on the *ShoBox* circuit, which, with the exception of a few early trips to England, has been exclusively confined to America, include Sloan, Iowa; Hinckley, Minnesota; Chester, West Virginia; Southaven, Mississippi, and Laredo, Texas. All have their particular charms and, more often than not, a casino to lure gamblers and fight fans like mini-Vegases.

Manager David McWater, who has a stable of 70 or so fighters under the banner of Split-T Management, feels about Miami, Oklahoma – that's pronounced "Miam-ah" by locals, as opposed to "Miam-ee" – the way that Farhood does about Santa Ynez. And why shouldn't he? He is a native of Oklahoma, proud of his home state and its traditions.

"We've been to Miami, Oklahoma, five or six times at least, and maybe more than that," McWater said of *ShoBox* cards he's been involved in at the Buffalo Run Casino. "Most of the smaller towns that have been involved in the series have casinos. The Buffalo Run has sold out for all of their *ShoBoxes*. It's always a big deal when *ShoBox* comes to town.

"A lot of these people are without major sports franchises; they're dying for stuff like that. If you're in New York, you have the Yankees, the Knicks, the Mets, the Giants, the Nets, the Rangers. You can get lost with all that going on. But in Miami, Oklahoma – or a lot of other small casino towns – it's a *happening*, the best thing to happen there that week, maybe even that whole month."

But it's not just the excitement of a pugilistic circus playing the boonies. It's the fight as much or more than

Promoter Gary Shaw.

Regis Prograis gained national exposure fighting on *ShoBox* cards in Miami, Oklahoma; and Verona, New York.

the site that makes *ShoBox*, the best series in televised boxing in McWater's estimation. Farhood's voluminous recordkeeping reveals that, at the time this story was written, *ShoBox* "graduates" had gone on to win 84 world championships, while 205 previously undefeated fighters had suffered their first defeat.

"We've been very consistent," Farhood said. "I think the fact that nobody before us and nobody since *ShoBox* began has copied the formula speaks volumes about (a) how difficult it is to do and (b), how well we do it.

"It's just as much about exposing the pretenders as it is about advancing the contenders."

Another promoter who is willing to take the risks that *ShoBox* poses in the hope of reaping its rewards is Lou DiBella, who has been on both sides of that risk/reward coin. "In too many fights today, the outcome is not in doubt," DiBella said. "That's why *ShoBox* is a little oasis of competitive fights with guys that deserve to be in those fights."

And this, from Gary Shaw, who first raised the idea of such a series with Showtime's then-boxing head, the late Jay Larkin, who enthusiastically signed off on it: "When I think of the fighters that passed through *ShoBox* and went on to become world champions and had to fight their asses off to get there, I know some of them would never have been heard of if they didn't get that start. *ShoBox* gave a lot of promoters the opportunity to put on real fights, tough fights, and to build stars. What SHOWTIME did was to look to the future, not the past."

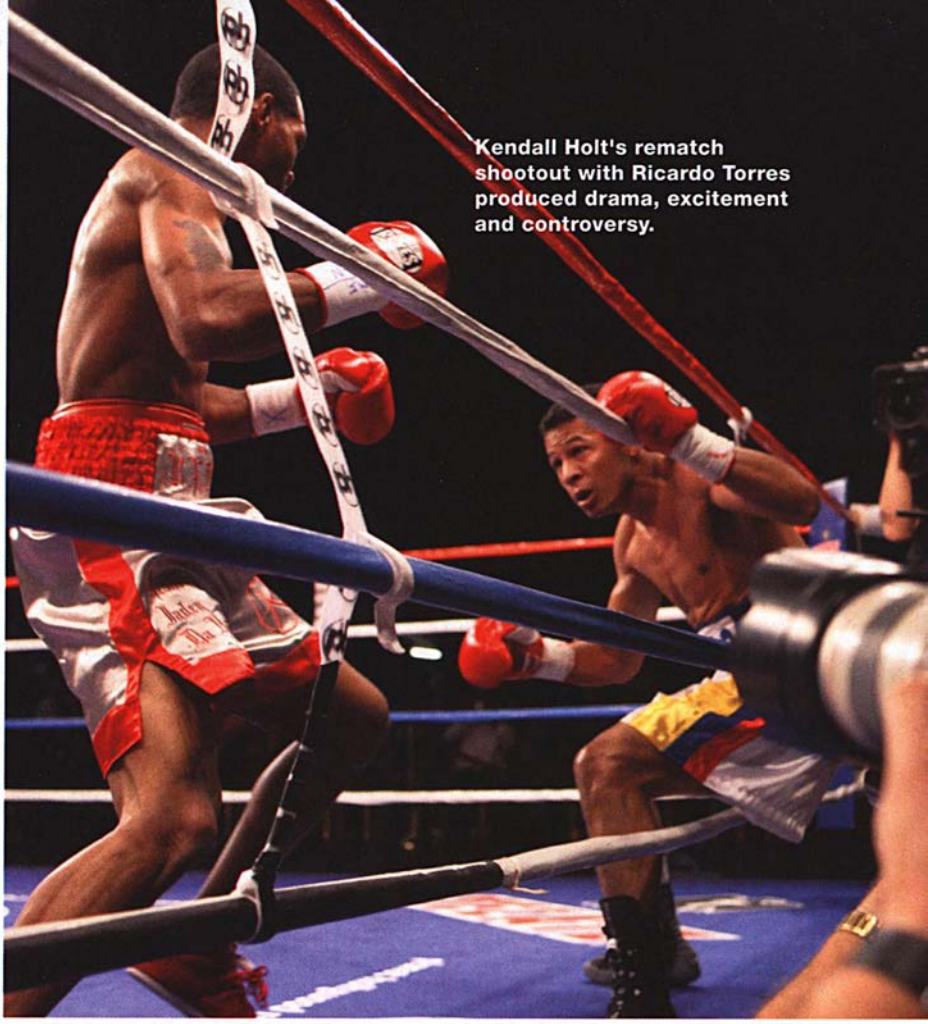
It's a future that still reserves a role for places that may not be major population centers, but can nonetheless play a role in the development of tomorrow's star attractions.

"We do joke that for some of these venues, like Steve said, to get there it's two flights and an hour-and-a-half drive," said Hall, the executive director who has been involved since the series' inception. "There are a lot of remote casinos that stage boxing cards. But it's always great going to places that might seem to be in the middle of nowhere, because they almost always sell out and that makes it feel like a big event. Everybody's excited about having us in their town. It's nice to go anyplace that appreciates your being there."

COBRA
TYSON
GHOST
EVERLAST
HAVOC

THE BEST (AND WORST) OF SHOBOX

SHOWTIME BOXING ANALYST AND INTERNATIONAL BOXING HALL OF FAMER **STEVE FARHOOD** LOOKS BACK ON THE MOST MEMORABLE MOMENTS AND NOTABLE FIGHTERS HE'S HAD THE HONOR OF WITNESSING DURING THE 20-YEAR HISTORY OF THE SERIES



Kendall Holt's rematch shootout with Ricardo Torres produced drama, excitement and controversy.

FARHOOD'S 15 BEST FIGHTERS

(Top left to bottom right)

TIMOTHY BRADLEY • LUCIAN BUTE • DIEGO CORRALES • CHAD DAWSON • NONITO DONAIRE • CARL FROCH • TYSON FURY • ROBERT GUERRERO • JOAN GUZMAN • RICKY HATTON • GUILLERMO RIGONDEAUX • CLARESSA SHIELDS • ERROL SPENCE JR. • ANDRE WARD • PAUL WILLIAMS

FARHOOD'S FIVE MOST DRAMATIC KAYOS

1. KENDALL HOLT KO 1 RICARDO TORRES, 7/5/08: Holt off the floor to win world title, but did he finish Torres with a butt?

2. CARLOS ABREGU KO 4 IRVING GARCIA, 5/1/09: More swings of momentum than any other fight in *ShoBox* history.

3. EBO ELDER KO 12 COURTNEY BURTON, 12/17/04: A victorious Elder, on his knees and his face misshapen, is the lasting image of the entire series.

4. JOHN MOLINA KO 10 MICKEY BEY, 7/19/13: Bey scores a virtual shutout for nine rounds, and then ...

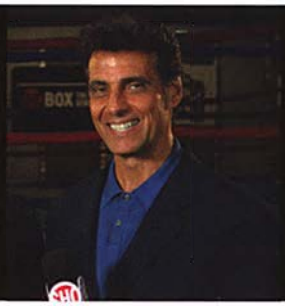
5. JAMEEL MCCLINE KO 10 CEDRIC BOSWELL, 10/3/03: There's nothing as dramatic as when a fighter needs a last-round kayo to win – and gets it.

THE BLOODIEST FIGHT »

SHARIF BOGERE W 10 RAY BELTRAN, MAY 13, 2011: The fight should've been sponsored by the Red Cross.

THE MOST EMOTIONAL MOMENT »

NICK CHARLES SAYS GOODBYE TO *SHOBOX*, APRIL 30, 2010.



SHOWTIME BOXING; GUERRERO: DONALD MIRALLE; GUZMAN: DOUG BENC

Heavyweight fringe contender Jameel McCline needed a final-round KO to beat Cedric Boswell.

FARHOOD'S FIVE MOST MEMORABLE FIRST ROUNDS

1. SECHEW POWELL KO 1 CORNELIUS BUNDRAGE, MAY 6, 2005: It's not often you see a legit double-knockdown – and with the very first punches of the fight! And a knockout with the third punch thrown!

2. KENDALL HOLT KO 1 RICARDO TORRES, JULY 5, 2008: Three knockdowns, a cut, a butt, and an illegal blow, all in 61 seconds. And a world title changes hands, too!

3. ALLAN GREEN KO 1 JAIDON CODRINGTON, NOVEMBER 4, 2005: The fight lasts 18 seconds. The postfight mayhem lasts a lot longer.

4. TJ WILSON KO 1 TRAVIS WALKER, OCTOBER 19, 2007: How unpredictable are heavyweights? This knockout happened in 15 seconds.

5. JAMES KIRKLAND KO 1 ALLEN CONYERS, NOVEMBER 30, 2007: Both fighters down in a wild shootout.

FARHOOD'S SIX WORST DECISIONS

DAVID BARNES W 12 JIMMY VINCENT, JULY 17, 2003: A robbery in Dagenham, England. The prospect Barnes was 12-0, while Vincent was 21-16-2. Vincent never won another fight.

SECHEW POWELL W 8 GRADY BREWER, JUNE 17, 2004: Unbeaten prospect Powell gets dropped, but Brewer is hit even harder by the judges.

RICO HOYE W 12 MONTELL GRIFFIN, SEPTEMBER 16, 2004: Hot prospect Hoye barely hits former world titlist Griffin, so how does he earn the verdict?

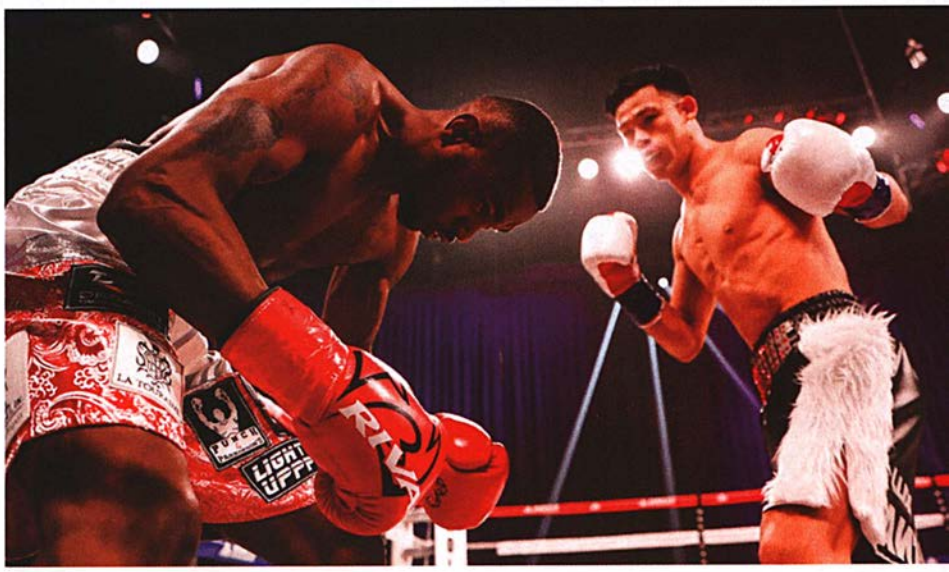
MIKE ANCHONDO W 8 MAURICIO HERRERA, DECEMBER 4, 2009: Some fighters just have styles that make for difficult fights to score. Herrera has that problem.

THOMAS MATTICE W 8 ZHORA HAMAZARYAN, JULY 20, 2018: Impossible to give Mattice more than three rounds. Maybe the worst of the worst.

JOE GEORGE W 10 MARCOS ESCUDERO, NOVEMBER 15, 2019: Escudero throws most of the punches and lands a high percentage of them – and hard!

FARHOOD'S 15 BEST ONE-PUNCH KAYOS (IN NO PARTICULAR ORDER)

Derek Edwards KO 1 Badou Jack, February 28, 2014 • Gary Russell Jr. KO 3 Roberto Castaneda, November 9, 2012 • Orlando Cruz KO 5 Leonilo Miranda, January 16, 2009 • Angelo Santana KO 5 Johnny Garcia, November 16, 2012 • Amir Imam KO 2 Jeremy Bryan, April 12, 2013 • Francisco Bojado KO 2 Eleazar Contreras, October 13, 2001 • Robert Guerrero KO 6 Gamaliel Diaz, June 23, 2006 • Robert Guerrero KO 8 Jason Litzau, February 29, 2008 • Giovanni Lorenzo KO 2 Dionisio Miranda, February 27, 2009 • Chris Avalos KO 4 Giovanni Caro, September 18, 2009 • Freddy Hernandez KO 5 DeMarcus "Chop Chop" Corley, February 5, 2010 • Tim Coleman KO 3 Patrick Lopez, October 1, 2010 • Joshua Greer KO 6 James Gordon Smith, March 10, 2017 • Jon Fernandez KO 2 Juan Reyes, June 9, 2017 • Brandun Lee KO 1 Jimmy Williams, October 7, 2020



Junior welterweight prospect Brandun Lee made quick work of Jimmy Williams.

THE MOST DRAMATIC SINGLE MOMENT »

LUCIAN BUTE W 12 LIBRADO ANDRADE, OCTOBER 24, 2008: Defending IBF super middleweight titlist Bute is dropped in the last 10 seconds of the final round. It gets crazy from there.

PHOTOS: STEVE GRAYSON

SHOBOX

WHERE NO SHOW HAD GONE BEFORE

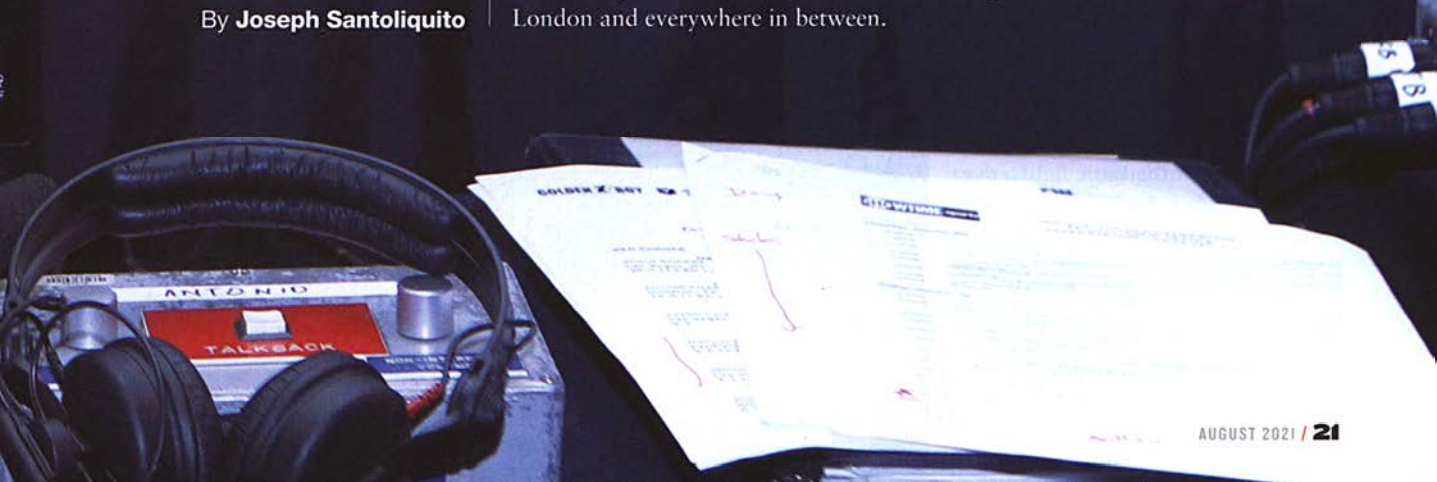
AN UNLIKELY BOXING INSTITUTION AND ITS 20-YEAR JOURNEY WAS SPAWNED OVER A DINNER BETWEEN A PROMOTER AND A NETWORK EXECUTIVE, ONE THAT HAS BEEN EMBRACED BY THE INDUSTRY

By **Joseph Santoliquito**

Gary Shaw shook his head as the Lincoln Tunnel lights flashed in sequence through his car. Grumbling under his breath and despite trying earnestly to convince himself otherwise, the promoter wasn't optimistic that his proposal had gone well.

Shaw was fortunate enough to have one believer in his wife, Jude. It made the 45-minute ride home to Wayne, New Jersey, one spring Friday night in 2001 far more palatable. Little did Shaw know he had another in Jay Larkin, whom he'd just had dinner with.

The idea put on the table that night in a dim basement Italian restaurant in Manhattan has since blossomed for two decades, establishing a staple of boxing in SHOWTIME's *ShoBox: The New Generation*. This July marks the 20th anniversary of the series, which has televised fights from Temecula, California, to London and everywhere in between.



WHERE NO SHOW HAD GONE BEFORE

A remote control in one hand and Diet Coke in the other, Shaw came up with the concept on his den sofa one April night in 2001. From there, the idea found its way to the social interlude with Larkin – the late, beloved SHOWTIME senior vice president – then into the capable hands of Gordon Hall and finally onto the TV screens of cable subscribers across the U.S.

It has produced 84 world titlists over 258 shows. It has allowed 15 fighters who lost on *ShoBox* to rebound and become world titlists themselves (Luis Collazo, Robert Guerrero, Eric Aiken, David Diaz, Isaac Hlatshwayo, Cornelius Bundrage, Rodrigo Guerrero, Ishe Smith, Gamaliel Diaz, Mickey Bey, Badou Jack, Caleb Truax, Ray Beltran, Tevin Farmer and Yordenis Ugas).

Most importantly, though, it has provided young, untested fighters a rare, high-profile proving platform during their gestation phase. And it's the only show of its kind with such longevity.

The funny thing is, no one initially involved thought *ShoBox* would survive this long. It's actually a continuing tribute to Larkin's belief in the series, Hall's vigilant guidance over the last two decades and President of SHOWTIME Sports Stephen Espinoza's unbending faith in ShoBox.

Even Shaw himself thought the idea might be dead before he'd made it through the Lincoln Tunnel.

"This is tough to remember everything back then, because I never thought anything was going to happen when I brought the idea up to Jay," recalled Shaw, now 76. "I was sitting on the sofa, channel-hopping one Saturday night, and I started to get disgusted with what I was seeing.

"I would sit around and see the same fighters in the same fights, over and over. Fights that you knew who

Heavyweight prospects Eddie Chambers (right) and Dominick Guinn met on May 4, 2007.

the winner would be before they fought. How could we develop the next Lennox Lewis or next Floyd Mayweather? Because there were no outlets willing to show young, up-and-coming fighters in tough."

The next morning, Shaw threw out an idea to his son, Jared. Jared's reaction: "I love a farm team."

But where to go with this? Who to talk to?

"I remember telling Jared I didn't think anyone was going to buy it," Shaw said. "Everyone was looking for name fighters, and it's why I thought the idea would fail. If there wasn't a name attached, it wouldn't have much success."

A few weeks later, Shaw made dinner reservations with a "name" man in the boxing business at a Manhattan Italian restaurant. Shaw and Larkin were friends. They could talk candidly with one another sans deflectors. They were a good pair, both stubby and energetic and approachable, once you peeled back the layers.

Both could also be as pugnacious as the fighters they dealt with – and also very meticulous.

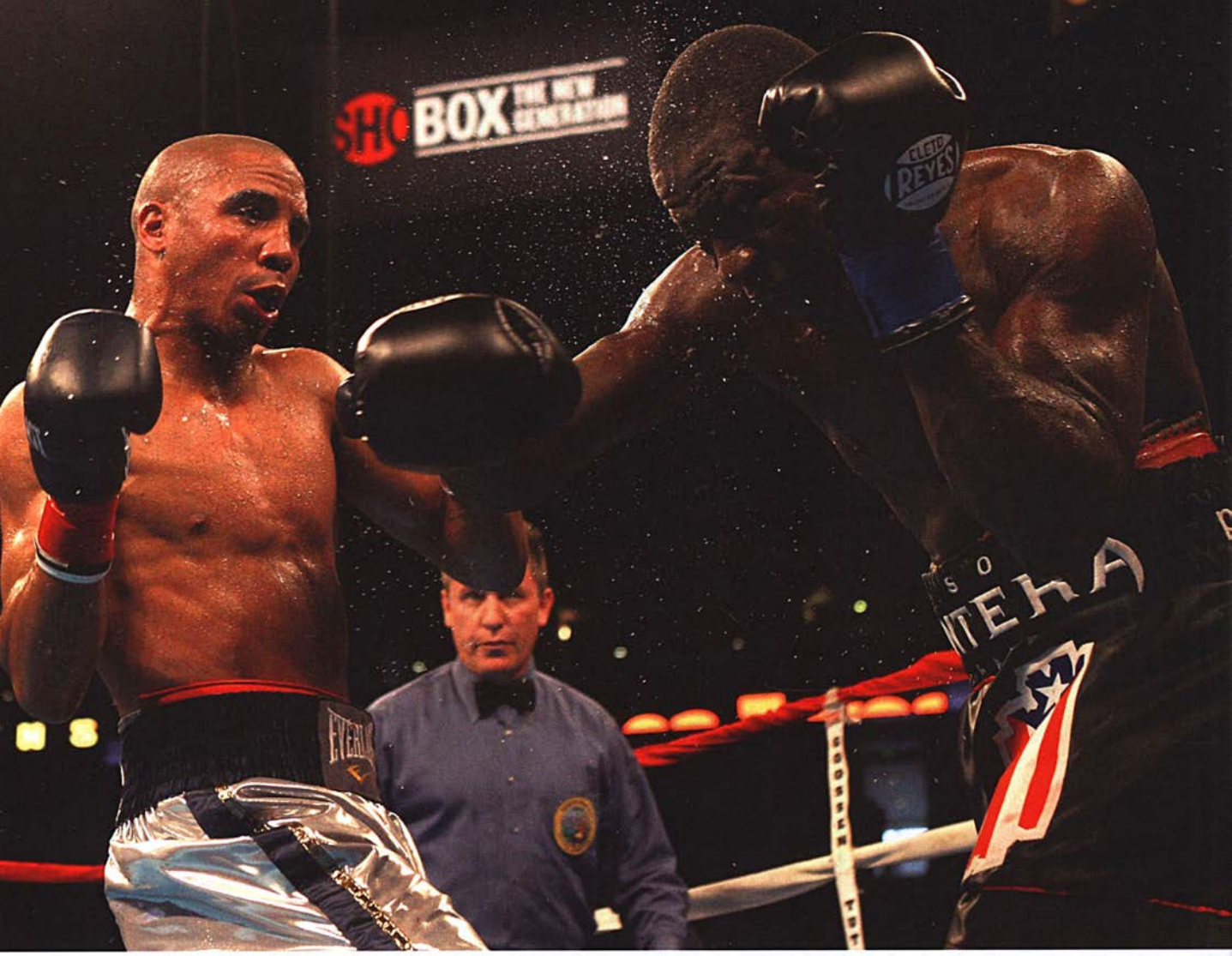
Larkin kept a small, leather-bound notebook with him and jotted down everything. If he didn't have it on him, chances are the notebook would be filled the next morning if Larkin heard something he liked. Every meeting was in that notebook, whether the person Larkin spoke to knew it or not.

What Shaw was about to tell him was notebook-worthy.

Shaw, Jude, Larkin and his wife, Lisa, were enjoying their dinner when, at some point, Shaw saw his chance. He leaned over the red table cloth and gave his pitch.

After a moment of reflection, Larkin blurted out that he loved it – with the caveat that English promoter Frank Warren be involved. Larkin was very close to Warren and asked Shaw if he would be opposed to giving up some dates to his dapper pal.

"Of course I wasn't," Shaw said. "If I got one date from SHOWTIME, it



would be one date more than I had. We decided to start out in Atlantic City, and I wanted to do the fights in black-and-white, to give it an old-time feel. But that idea got thrown out. The goal was 12 to 14 dates a year."

Shaw also felt compelled to go to HBO. He approached them about it, just to be fair. HBO had zero interest. He remembers being on a speaker phone with them and stressed that dismissing the notion would be a big mistake. HBO was waiting for ESPN at the time to provide them with new faces.

"HBO only wanted to deal with the very top," Shaw said. "Well, when you're dealing with the very top, there's a long fall down. In retrospect, I was right and SHOWTIME was the winner. HBO wasn't even willing to listen."

Twenty years later, SHOWTIME CHAMPIONSHIP BOXING and *ShoBox* still exist. HBO got out of the boxing business in 2018, after 45 years.

"One of the biggest mistakes boxing was making was picking winners and losers, where some networks would only deal with Al Haymon or Bob Arum (as exclusive partners on their respective network), which cut out other promoters who also had talent," Shaw said. "I also thought boxing was hurting itself by cutting out the backstories of these fighters.

"Fighters have some of the most compelling backstories in sports. Their stories weren't being told. Jay and SHOWTIME were not only willing to develop rising talent, but to tell their stories through *ShoBox*. That was part of why Jay wanted it."

After Larkin and Shaw shook hands on the proposal, Shaw had one big problem: How was this going to unfold?

"I always have a belief in Gary, but that night driving home from our dinner with Jay and Lisa, I remember Gary asking me, 'Do you really think this can be pulled off?'" recalled Jude Shaw, who's been married to Gary for 43 years. "I remember telling him that he could do it. Gary really didn't think he could, but once he puts his mind to something, he doesn't let go."

Neither did Larkin.

Andre Ward outpointed Edison Miranda on *ShoBox*, his first real test in what would be a Hall of Fame career.

If *ShoBox* belongs to anyone, it belongs to Hall, *ShoBox*'s executive producer. Shaw placed the concept on the table. Hall, who Shaw admits grew *ShoBox*, ran with it. Larkin had the faith to lure Hall over from NBC Sports, where he was a production manager working on golf and football. Hall was also a production manager

JED JACOBSOHN

for NBC's Sports World, doing boxing with Marv Albert and Ferdie Pacheco.

Hall came to SHOWTIME in 1990 with knowledge, experience and a passion for boxing. Prior to him arriving, the cable giant used to contract out production teams to produce and package its boxing telecasts. When SHOWTIME decided to go in-house instead, it was Hall who hired the engineering staff and mobile units, coordinated the transmission and oversaw the production management and packaging of his first fight, which was Evander Holyfield against Seamus McDonagh on June 1, 1990, at Boardwalk Hall in Atlantic City, New Jersey.

In mid-2001, Larkin called a staff meeting to broach this new idea for a boxing series.

"I'm the beginning we had only two promoters, Gary who was with Main Events and Frank Warren. It was difficult matching the fighters in the early years," Hall said. "I always had differences of opinions on how we should match the fighters. Matching fighters is always a negotiation.

"The challenges in the early years was to not just take what was given to us but to try to negotiate to make a good matchup. Both Main Events, and later Gary Shaw Promotions, and Warren no doubt had talented fighters, but could we make competitive matchups?

"What strengthened *ShoBox* over the years was when we became an open house. It allowed us to create competition among promoters and gave us more leverage with making step-up fights. I want fighters to be matched as tough as possible. It's not an easy conversation and not an easy one to win."

As Hall sat there when Larkin first brought up *ShoBox*, he admittedly had his doubts. Many in the boxing industry liked the idea, though they all repeated the same mantra to Hall: "a great idea that wouldn't last."

"Jay Larkin looked around the room and he thought I would be a good person to be the executive producer on it, but he probably thought the thing would only last a few years anyway," Hall said. "Who would have thought that a series with unknown fighters in the infancy of their careers in hopefully competitive matchups would capture the attention of boxing fans?

"At first, everybody was excited to see a new series of boxing, but

Future British stars, including Carl Froch, made their U.S. TV debuts on *ShoBox*.

because of what it was perceived to be, there was doubt whether it would last. I was willing to give the series every bit that I had, and I have, to make this series succeed. I did have my doubts, but that came because of the difficulty working with matchmakers to make these fights.

"*ShoBox* is not about the names like SHOWTIME CHAMPIONSHIP BOXING. It's easy to get behind the sexy fights. Both internally at SHOWTIME and externally with the press, *ShoBox* is harder to sell, but if you can reinforce the purpose and definition and make competitive matchups regardless of the names, people will buy into it. Fans want to see competitive matchups and stars of tomorrow, and time has validated what we set out to do 20 years ago.

"Everyone who works on this series at SHOWTIME SPORTS is proud of what we have done. I just don't believe 20 years have gone by. We didn't even have a name for the series when Jay first brought it up."

Hall, along with Sheila Mills, SHOWTIME vice president of sports marketing; Marina Capura, head of SHOWTIME sports public relations; and Earl Fash, SHOWTIME's vice president and creative director, came together to call the new show *ShoBox: The New Generation*.

SHOWTIME originally wanted *ShoBox: The Next Generation*, but couldn't get the trademark because *Star Trek: The Next Generation* already owned it. That's how the quartet decided on *ShoBox: The New Generation*.

If *ShoBox* is Hall's baby, Hall of Fame announcer Steve Farhood is certainly *ShoBox's* godfather.

Farhood was chosen as the series' analyst from a group of other possibilities that included former champions and respected writers. Nick Charles was the original blow-by-blow announcer for *ShoBox*, and he gave the series instant credibility.

But who to fill the analyst position?

Farhood, a former editor of The Ring, was an easy fit. He came with great storytelling ability and an acute eye for the sport.

"I was thinking *ShoBox* was a great idea and I wanted to be a part of it for a couple of reasons," Farhood said. "SHOWTIME is the highest level of production and I wanted to be with the best. Nick was hired early on in the process, and I was hired pretty late.

"In the beginning, we did have doubts, because it was a new venture. We provide young fighters with exposure and activity. I think when you're in an industry for over 40 years, you become associated with certain things. But I've been more closely associated with *ShoBox* than anything else and proudly so. It's a show that's needed."

And still going.

Espinoza is in his 10th year at SHOWTIME. He continues to be committed to *ShoBox*.

"All of us here at SHOWTIME are incredibly proud of the franchise," Espinoza said. "I believe *ShoBox* is the strongest brand in boxing. When a boxing fan hears *ShoBox*, they know exactly what that means. It has currency, value and identity throughout the sport.

"It was literally created from nothing with just an idea. Gordon Hall, (director) Rick Phillips, (producer) Rich Gaughan and (production operator) Joe Jacovino have been there since the beginning, along with Steve Farhood. We take an amount of pride in the series, but those guys have spent the bulk of their careers on *ShoBox*.

"As a director, one of the more challenging and enjoyable things is to launch a new show," said Phillips. "With *ShoBox*, that experience was even more special because of the type of show. There's always been an honesty and clarity about the *ShoBox* mission to showcase up-and-coming fighters, and it's great to be a part of creating champions.

"On a personal level, it's been a terrific experience. I've made lifelong friends here on *ShoBox*; besides being consummate professionals, the production and technical crew are just really good people and great to be around."

"I thought the concept of *ShoBox* was terrific and long overdue," added Gaughan. "These fighters were often ignored and buried under more significant matches. With *ShoBox*, they would take center stage.

"I have traveled to places unfamiliar to most and had the unique opportunity to speak to and watch young, unknown fighters put it all on the line chasing their dreams. I have witnessed specific moments of very human responses to adversity. Some rose to the occasion while others crumbled.

"I can't help but root for the fighters who have passed through our show and somehow take pride in their accomplishments. I see so many champions, like Tyson Fury, Deontay Wilder and Regis Prograis, and think: I knew them when."

At 5 p.m. on Saturday, July 21, 2001, the first *ShoBox* appeared at Bally's in Atlantic City. The first fight featured John Molnar (18-1-1) scoring an eight-round technical decision over Victor Rosado (17-2-1). The ring announcer was Amy Hayes. In the main event, lightweight Leo Dorin (17-0) stopped Martin O'Malley, also 17-0, in the ninth round.

Six months later, Dorin won the WBA lightweight belt, becoming the first *ShoBox* fighter to win a world title.

It defined *ShoBox*.

"I would definitely say *ShoBox* exceeded everyone's expectations, and what validates the series for me is that boxing fans love the series," Hall said. "When Stephen Espinoza landed at SHOWTIME 10 years ago, he could have easily canceled *ShoBox* and used that money for something else. He did not.

"It's lasted this long. That says something." SHO

Joseph Santoliquito is an award-winning sportswriter who has been working for The Ring Magazine/ RingTV.com since October 1997 and is the president of the Boxing Writers Association of America. He can be followed on Twitter @JSantoliquitō.

Austin Trout improved to 24-0 after stopping Frank LoPorto in six rounds in November 2011.

SHOWTIME BOXING

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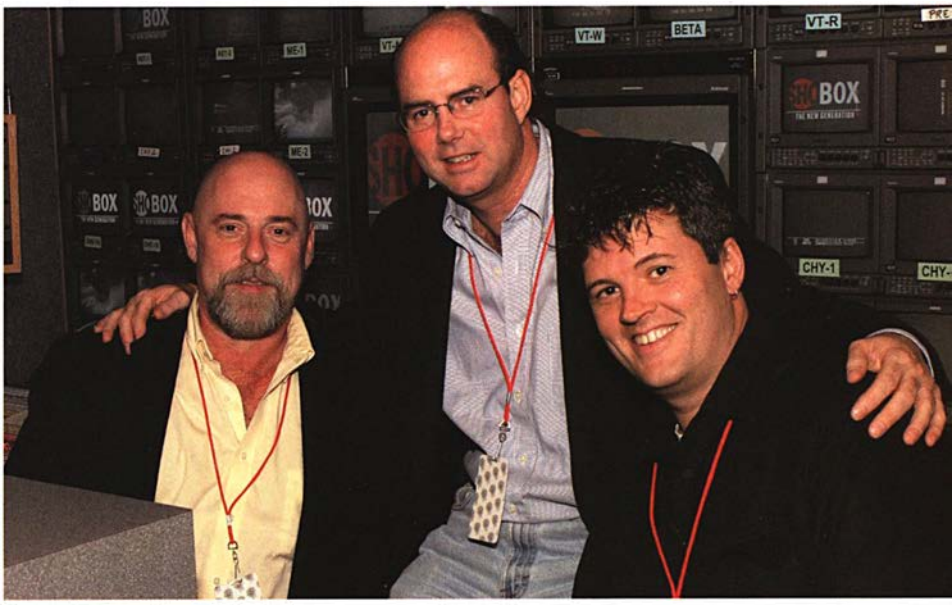
STAYING ON MISSION

A Q&A WITH GORDON HALL, EXECUTIVE PRODUCER (THE 'GUARDIAN AT THE GATE') OF *SHOBOX*: THE NEW GENERATION

By **Steve Kim**



When you think of the *ShoBox* series, what often comes to mind are the fledgling fighters who are oftentimes unheralded and relatively unknown, who are getting their first taste of national exposure. Now coming up on its 20th anniversary, it has become a steady breeding ground for future champions.

The likes of Ricky Hatton, Timothy Bradley, Chad Dawson, Andre Ward, Shawn Porter and Gary Russell Jr. are just a few of the names who have cut their teeth on this long-running SHOWTIME platform on their way to bigger and better things.

And there has been one individual who has been the guardian at the gate from the very inception of this series, doing his best to ensure – unlike many other boxing series – that there is a standard of quality that is adhered to on a consistent basis.

"*ShoBox* is *ShoBox* because of [Executive Producer] Gordon Hall," stated Steve Farhood, who has been ringside for all but one broadcast since 2001. "It really is. He looks after the show; it's his baby. He cares about it more than anyone else does, and the reason we're still on air after 20 years is because he's been at the helm the whole 20 years."

Hall, who came over to SHOWTIME after a stint at NBC Sports as a production manager, was first brought when the network decided to execute an in-house production for its broadcast featuring Evander Holyfield's bout versus Seamus McDonagh in June 1990. Ten years later, as Hall rose to the vice president of production, he was given the added responsibility of being the executive producer of the new boxing program that would focus on up-and-coming prospects.

It's a job that he still has today.

And after all his years, Hall's legacy will be this series. It's something that's on his mind every day.

The Ring Magazine spoke with Hall about *ShoBox* and his contributions to its longevity and evolution.

RING MAGAZINE: What was the genesis of the *ShoBox* concept? How did this evolve?

GORDON HALL: The concept of *ShoBox*, of having young prospects featured on a series, came to light from Jay Larkin (the former senior executive producer of sports and events programming at SHOWTIME) and Gary Shaw (then at Main Events), as I recall.

RM: What was the first thing you ever did on behalf of the series?

GH: I worked with Jay and our marketing team as far as thinking about what the title of this show was going to be and how we were going to present it. And then I remember we auditioned announcers. Jay, producer Rich Gaughan and myself oversaw that.

Joe Tessitore was auditioned, along with Brian Kilmeade, who is now at Fox, along with Nick Charles, along with Gary Apple – he's at SNY now for play-by-play. We decided on Nick, who we felt brought instant credibility to this new series.

Then we interviewed analysts. I believe we brought in Ron Borges, we brought in (two-time light heavyweight champ) Virgil Hill, we brought in Steve Farhood, but no one stood out like Steve, who of course

(Above) The driving forces behind *ShoBox* are (left to right) director Rick Phillips, Hall and producer Rich Gaughan.

was well-known in boxing circles for his expert knowledge of the sport, having been a former editor of The Ring Magazine, a boxing historian and top boxing beat writer. Steve was going to be the guy to help put our prospects' talents and stories in perspective.

Both Rich and director Rick Phillips had been longtime hires in several capacities on SHOWTIME BOXING and much like me were given a "step up" job and tasked to help make this series a success.

I am not sure anyone thought that a series about unknown young fighters matched tough would have a long life, but I certainly was going to do my best.

RM: When was it made clear to you that, more or less, 'Gordon, this is your series; you're in charge of quality control here.' When was that outlined specifically?

GH: It happened in the beginning. Jay made me the co-executive producer right off the bat. I joke about it because of the fact [that] here we are, boxing is a niche sport, right? Who wants to see no-name fighters in the infancy of their careers? But we knew we had a plan for it, and Jay put me on the series. I had been there for 10 years. I looked forward to the challenge.

We knew we had a show that was different from any other series, and the key was to get the talented prospects, the best fighters we could. But in the early stages, we were only working with Gary Shaw, who was at Main Events at the time, and Frank Warren. So we were only bringing along Main Events fighters, and you're always going to have an agenda. The promoter is going to want to keep his fighter winning. Then the network is going to want to put on competitive fights in order to keep an audience.

We had, in the early days, Juan Diaz. We had Leo Dorin in our first fight – he went on to win a world championship. We ended up having Luis Collazo, Jeff Lacy, Ricky Hatton. But they weren't always the most competitive fights. But we did have the stars of tomorrow on the series. What really helped in making *ShoBox* popular and have the long life that it has had is when we opened it up to other promoters. That is where I was an advocate of moving towards other promoters, because I could see that the matchups we were having, that yes we were getting a lot of A-level prospects, but matching them was very difficult.

In some cases, we were relegated to just taking what we had to take. Once we were able to move away from that and create some competition between promoters, it opened it up. It led to a competitive marketplace and only led to better matchups.

Adding Top Rank, Golden Boy, Goossen Tutor not only brought more top prospects and future champions but also gave us some leverage on making stronger matchups with promoters competing for shows. I am very proud that we have worked with over 30 promoters over our 20 years.

RM: In essence, you are the matchmaker for *ShoBox*, so what was the learning curve in terms of that particular role?

GH: I am not the technical matchmaker, but I am the quality control guy. I can tell you I love to do the research on the matchups. I always had that, so I always

Daniel Roman (left) went from a tough fight on *ShoBox* to unifying two 122-pound world titles.

JuanMa Lopez halted Cuauhtemoc Vargas in six rounds on ShoBox.

researched fighters. I talk more to the matchmakers than I did the promoters once the deal was done to feature their fighters. So in doing so, I learned a lot about the fighters. Going to Lou DiBella's and others' club fights in New York City, dealing with all the matchmakers, from Chris Middendorf, John Beninati, Tom Brown, Ron Katz, Eric Gomez and Robert Diaz, Bruce Trampler and Brad Goodman.

I had to deal with all them, and all have their own ideas on how a fighter should be matched at that time and why. I didn't always agree, but I learned to understand their reasoning, whether it was right or wrong in my mind. And my good friend Steve Farhood, there's not enough time for where I could sit in a room or a phone call and learn from him.

Also we have the internet; we can go and see what the fighters look like in the ring. I mean, records can be deceiving. So I would try to learn from whether it be promoters, whether it be matchmakers, whether it be managers, and learn from them. I developed a passion for it, really wanting to know. I take great pride – and it doesn't always happen this way – but the majority of our shows, we can make a case on how the red corner fighters can legitimately win the fight and how the blue corner fighters can legitimately win the fight. I'm proud of that.

I feel that I can defend all of our *ShoBox* matchups because I am that involved in the making of the fights.

RM: Every couple of years you hear about the demise of *ShoBox*, that it may not be in the overall plans of Showtime. Have you ever been fearful that the series was going to be canceled?

GH: I'm afraid the *ShoBox* franchise is going to go away every day that I work on *ShoBox*. This goes back ... In staff meetings I would try to promote the *ShoBox* show, [whether it's to] Stephen Espinoza (the current head of Showtime Sports), Jay Larkin or Ken Hershman, we'll go to our staff sheet on our weekly meeting, and I would start off, like, 'OK, November 4th, *ShoBox* returns with a three-fight card,' and I would go through and give a little summary of the matchups. And even today, I will, if I'm putting together a card, send the card to Stephen, break it down, tell him about some of the fights, because not everybody is going to know who these young kids are; not everyone is going to know these fights. I have to be able to sell this card in order to feel that it's going to be successful. As long as I can do that, then I believe that whether they continue *ShoBox* or not, that I've done my job. And obviously we've done it well for 20 years.

But it doesn't go without thinking that every show could be your last show.

ShoBox was there when Jay was there, and Ken Hershman. Stephen Espinoza came in, he could've killed the series. And Stephen gave me the opportunity to improve the series to the best of my ability. He had confidence in me and felt it was important, because he's such a boxing guy. He realizes the importance of the series to the sport, and SHOWTIME.

THE CHAMPIONS

SHOBOX PROVIDED VALUABLE EXPOSURE TO A VAST NUMBER OF FUTURE WORLD TITLEHOLDERS, SOME BECAME HOUSEHOLD NAMES, OTHERS ARE FORGOTTEN, BUT ALL HAD ONE THING IN COMMON - THEY WEREN'T AFRAID TO BE TESTED EARLY IN THEIR CAREERS

By **Dan Rafael**

Looking back 20 years later, it seems only appropriate that the first main event in the history of SHOWTIME's prospect oriented series *ShoBox: The New Generation* would involve a boxer who would go on to win a world title.

It was July 21, 2001, and in the ballroom at Bally's in Atlantic City, New Jersey, the series' first headliner matched a pair of 17-0 lightweights. Montreal-based Romanian Leonard Dorin, a two-time Olympian, would stop Martin O'Malley in the ninth round that Saturday afternoon. Two fights and six months later, Dorin would earn a split decision over Raul Balbi to win the WBA lightweight crown.

Dorin became the first in a consistent run of *ShoBox* alumni

From featherweight to heavyweight, many of today's top fighters fought on *ShoBox* when they were prospects.

to go on to win a world title after appearing on the series. There have been 84 in all, including many major names.

Among them: Tyson Fury, Deontay Wilder, Ricky Hatton, Andre Ward, Nonito Donaire, Jermain Taylor, Kelly Pavlik, Timothy Bradley Jr., Carl Froch, Paul Williams, Andre Berto, Victor Ortiz, Demetrius Andrade, Yuriorkis Gamboa, Shawn Porter, Errol Spence Jr., Jermell Charlo, Jermall Charlo, Claressa Shields, David Benavidez, Gary Russell Jr., Regis Prograis and Devin Haney, to name just a few.

Ward boxed on *ShoBox* five times before becoming a unified super middleweight and light heavyweight world champion, a pound-for-pound list stalwart and, so far, the lone fighter from the series to be elected to the International Boxing Hall of Fame.

That the series could become such a significant breeding ground for future titleholders – with 84 through 258 total cards, that means a future champion has appeared on roughly every third show – was not something those involved in the series thought about in the beginning.

"The possibility of a winner on *ShoBox* becoming a world champion wasn't in my mind yet," Steve Farhood, the International Boxing Hall of Famer and a ringside analyst throughout the entire series run, said when reflecting on the first card headlined by Dorin. "But after a while, we saw what happened with fighters like (future titleholders) Jeff Lacy, Kermit Cintron and Juan Diaz early on on the show. With Dorin, I realized he might fight for a world

Tevin Farmer went on to win the IBF 130-pound title.

title someday, but I didn't make the connection yet that success on *ShoBox* could lead to success at the highest level."

But it sure has. The series has produced future world titleholders in 14 of boxing's 17 weight classes, including five heavyweights: Fury, Wilder, Samuel Peter, Ruslan Chagaev and Trevor Bryan. Another 11 fighters went on to win junior welterweight titles. Ten more have won welterweight belts and 10 lightweights have done the same.

Bradley, who fought on the show four times, was one of those junior welterweights. He won his first 140-pound title by split decision over Junior Witter in England in 2008 and knows what fighting on *ShoBox* meant to his career.

"*ShoBox* takes prospects and turns them into world champions," Bradley said. "Not only do they make prospects and turn them into contenders, but they turn these contenders into world champions. You need that. ... They don't match you up with a nobody. They match you with a guy who can fight. It's a different level on *ShoBox*, and it will get you ready for the big leagues."

While 84 *ShoBox* fighters went on to win titles, another 82 went on to fight for a world title but came up short.

"We promote the 84 all the time, but there's 82 fighters from *ShoBox* who have fought for a world title and lost, so it's 166 fighters that have at least fought for a world title. And when you look at the number of shows that we've done and the number of fights we've done, that's a very high percentage," Farhood said. "We had Froch, Fury and Hatton all make their American TV debuts on *ShoBox*. Pretty much shortly after it began, the show got a reputation of 'If you want to fight on *ShoBox*, you have to take your toughest opponent to date.' If you know what you have and you have a legitimate prospect as a manager or promoter, you're not scared to fight tough opponents because, a) you think your guy's gonna win, and b) it's the only way he's gonna learn."

Devon Alexander, a former junior welterweight and welterweight titlist who boxed on *ShoBox* twice, in 2007 and 2009, said it was just what he needed to boost his career.

"*ShoBox* brings out the best in young fighters," Alexander said. "It gives us confidence in ourselves. *ShoBox* is an important aspect of boxing nowadays because everybody watches *ShoBox*. I still watch *ShoBox*. I came from *ShoBox*.

"It's very important for the world to see up-and-coming fighters who are going to be future world champions, and *ShoBox* has definitely helped a tremendous amount of fighters."

The matchmaking is tough. There have been 15 fighters who lost on *ShoBox* and still went on to win titles.

"Ishe Smith was one of these guys that fought and won and fought and lost on *ShoBox*," Farhood said of the former junior middleweight titlist. "There are 'haves' and 'have nots' in our business, and Ishe was never a 'have.' He won a world title, and to me he symbolizes the show more than any other fighter because of how willing he was to fight anybody."

Smith was on the series five times between 2003 and 2010 and was never afraid to take a gamble. It was those tough fights that helped him become a titleholder in 2013.

"*ShoBox* to me isn't about money or how much you are making," Smith said. "It's a platform to get your name out there. You are going to be seen by the world. It's about stepping up and making good fights and taking risks.

"I hate seeing mismatches on television, especially when a fighter is too good to be in a mismatch, because once you have a certain amount of fights, you need to fight good fighters. I know with *ShoBox* you are going to get that."

When it comes to fighters from the show eventually winning titles, Farhood said many of them must first get through what he calls their "graduation day" fight.

"Some of these guys were destined to be champions no matter what. And then there are those guys who had that pivotal fight that we call graduation day," Farhood said. "I think of Andre Ward with Edison Miranda. I think of Chad Dawson with Eric Harding – fights that very quickly led to titles."

Dawson, a two-time light heavyweight champion, boxed on *ShoBox* in 2005 and 2006. It was his 2006 step-up win against former title challenger Harding that launched him into a title fight in his next bout, when he outpointed Tomasz Adamek to win the WBC belt.

"*ShoBox* helped with my career because I got to be on national TV," Dawson said. "After the Eric Harding fight, you wouldn't believe how many people knew who I was after that fight. I started to develop a fanbase. People knew who I was. We got a call after the Harding fight to fight for a world title. I was like, 'Wow.' If it wasn't for *ShoBox*, I wouldn't have gotten that fight. I wouldn't have won that title that night."

There are some fighters Farhood saw as prospects that he said he knew would be future champions immediately, regardless of a "graduation day" bout. Three on his list are Hatton, who went on to win junior welterweight and welterweight titles and became a British legend; reigning WBA light heavyweight champion Dmitry Bivol; and WBC lightweight titleholder Haney.

"Ricky Hatton, seeing him as a prospect and a contender in Manchester, there was not a doubt in my mind he was going to become a world champion. No doubt. Dmitry Bivol is another example, and Haney really stood out. Haney fought tough opponents and he was willing to do so as a teenager. That's very impressive, and now we see where he's at."

Hatton was already a star in England before appearing on *ShoBox* in 2001 and twice in 2002, but he credits those appearances with his gaining a following in the U.S. before he scored an upset to win the junior welterweight title from Kostya Tszyu on SHOWTIME CHAMPIONSHIP BOXING in 2005.

"A lot of people remember me for the big fights – the Kostya Tszyu, the (Floyd) Mayweather fights and all the others, the (Jose Luis) Castillo fight. I think *ShoBox*, while they didn't make me a household name, they made me a name in the fact that even before my chance came against Kostya Tszyu, which was my ultimate main fight, I think the American audience knew of me, which makes a big difference. Instead of it being Kostya Tszyu against some kid from England, it was Kostya Tszyu versus Ricky Hatton, so fighting on *ShoBox* put me in the limelight."

Farhood said looking back over the two-decade run of the show he isn't surprised so many fighters went on to win titles after facing tough opposition on *ShoBox*.

"I think it's fitting and I think it's to the credit of (executive producer) Gordon (Hall), obviously, who has maintained a very high standard, and it's to the credit of the promoters," Farhood said. "The promoters are the ones who make the matches. Not SHOWTIME. SHOWTIME buys the matches but doesn't make the matches. We have to approve them, of course, but you have to give the promoters credit, whether it's Lou DiBella, who's always matched his guys tough, or Gary Shaw, who promoted more shows on *ShoBox* than anybody.

"You have to give them credit for understanding the value of the show, which is you are giving them a chance to match their fighters not only tough, and not only giving them exposure on national television, but giving them matches in which they can learn."

For 84 of those fighters, they were lessons good enough to reach the promised land of a world title.

Yordenis Ugas lost on *ShoBox* but is now a top welterweight.

THE PROVING GROUND

By **Steve Kim**

THE FORMULA TO **SHOBOX'S** SUCCESS IS ITS EVEN MATCHUPS, WHICH ARE TOUGH ON PROSPECTS AND PROMOTERS BUT HAVE EARNED THE RESPECT OF THE BOXING INDUSTRY

On the night of July 21, 2001, at Bally's in Atlantic City, New Jersey, a card took place that was promoted by Main Events. In the co-feature, John Molnar scored an eight-round decision over Victor Rosado. Leo Dorin stopped Martin O'Malley in the ninth round of the main event. The card is an afterthought to many, but it holds historical significance as the initial broadcast of the *ShoBox: the New Generation* series on SHOWTIME.

There have been a myriad of boxing series throughout the years, but the mission statement of this particular franchise was unique.

"There had never been a show dedicated to prospects – solely to prospects – in the past and in the 20 years since," pointed out Steve Farhood, who has been part of the *ShoBox* broadcast crew from its inception. "I think creating a platform for a young fighter to get the invaluable exposure that national television provides is really our legacy, and it's unique."

Throughout its two-decade run, *ShoBox* has consistently provided a pathway for future champions to ply their craft in matchups that are specifically made to test their mettle. They may get the benefit of soft matchmaking from their promoters, but once they hit this platform, the bouts are then meticulously looked over – and approved by – executive producer Gordon Hall.

Tyson Fury (11-0) was matched with the unbeaten Rich Power (12-0) when they fought on *ShoBox*.

Former champ Diego Corrales had to battle a game Felix St. Kitts on his way back to title contention in 2003.

Lou DiBella, who has put scores of boxers on *ShoBox*, says Hall "deserves a lot of the credit because he has such a dedication to making sure that there's competitive action.

"To be able to create enough of a brand where fighters are willing to fight for $10,000 in a pandemic, in a 50/50 fight, because they know what *ShoBox* can do for your career," DiBella continued, "that's quite an accomplishment."

And unlike many other televised series that generally cater to just one promoter, *ShoBox* has aimed to be as agnostic as possible.

"There are very few of them that are left that aren't with Eddie (Hearn), Oscar (De La Hoya), Al (Haymon) or Bob (Arum)," pointed out DiBella, who long ago played the same role Hall did as the gatekeeper during the glory days of HBO Sports when that premium cable platform was the dominant network in U.S. boxing. His job was to uphold the quality control of the programming.

"I don't understand why other people haven't caught up with the idea," said the always outspoken now-promoter, who has run DiBella Entertainment since 2001. "Hire an internal person who's not associated with a promotional stable, give someone a big checkbook to go out and make the biggest and best fights that are open to everybody."

But unlike the multi-million dollar budget that DiBella once had at his disposal, the license fees for *ShoBox* telecasts generally run below six figures, and oftentimes they will have three or four fights that are featured. The money isn't great, but it's the opportunity for young boxers to often get their first real TV time – but that exposure comes with a caveat: They are also put in tough.

There are theoretically no "house fights" on this series. That's not to say there aren't heavy favorites, but the goal is to match these fighters as difficult as possible. At this point, most everyone in the industry understands what they are getting into.

"I think we have clearly identified what *ShoBox* is about and that people in the industry are aware of that," explained Hall. "I think fighters are aware of that, that when they come over to *ShoBox*, they know that they are going to be tested. My reasoning is, I truly believe what we're doing on *ShoBox* is helpful to the fighter, his maturation in becoming a contender and hopeful world champion.

"I believe it's good for the sport of boxing, because it's helping move the fighters along at a faster pace. We're giving young fighters at eight, nine to 15 fights in their career exposure multiple times to have people start to know them earlier than what they would have gotten."

And for promoters, it gives them an idea if they should fish or cut bait with a fighter.

"You can get a guy to 10-0, but what's the point of getting a guy to 15-0 and 20-0 if he can't fight?" asked DiBella, rather rhetorically. "If a guy can't fight, you need to know around his 10th, 11th fight, not only in fairness to you but to the kid and his management. I need to know if you can fight – and that's when *ShoBox* comes in."

Sampson Lewkowicz, best known for having discovered the likes of Manny Pacquiao and Sergio Martinez, regularly brings boxers onto *ShoBox*, and he says, "I cannot give them easy fights or tune-ups" on this series. And while the purses aren't great by any stretch, he adds that "you come for

Brandun Lee was the first to stop the battle-tested Camilo Prieto (15-2).

David Benavidez stopped Felipe Romero on ShoBox in 2015 on his way to the top of the 168-pound division.

low pay but also the glory."

Thompson Boxing, which is located in Southern California, began its operations in 2001. For years, it has run a consistent schedule of club shows with the Doubletree Hotel in Ontario, Cailfornia, serving as its main hub. With this venue as its foundation, the company has cultivated the likes of Tim Bradley, Josesito Lopez, former bantamweight beltholder Yhonny Perez and, more recently, former unified junior featherweight titleholder Danny Roman, all of whom made appearances on *ShoBox*.

Alex Camponovo, who serves as Thompson Boxing's matchmaker and general manager, says that there is an understanding that unlike his other fights, ultimately he won't have final authority on who his boxers face on *ShoBox*. And many times you have the wants of the fighter and their management versus the demands of

Future champ Badou Jack (right) fought once-beaten Farah Ennis (21-1) on his way up the rankings.

Shawn Porter displayed the relentless style that would win welterweight titles vs. Jamar Patterson.

Jaron Ennis was The Ring Magazine 2020 Prospect Of The Year.

the network. It can be a tough sell to the fighter's team.

"If it's a fight that's going to be productive for your fighter, you want to have them challenged," Camponovo explained. "But at the same time, you have to be able to present it to the fighter and their team that it's the right match, the proper situation, lay down the groundwork for what that fight in particular means to their careers and how you move forward from there.

"*ShoBox* has been instrumental in the development of a lot of champions, a lot of contenders in the sport, and continues to do so."

Welterweight contender Jaron Ennis and junior welterweight prospect Brandun Lee look as though they will be the next notable graduates of *ShoBox*. Ennis has already ascended to the SHOWTIME CHAMPIONSHIP BOXING series, while Lee has the look of one of the sport's brightest talents. Both are promoted by D&D Boxing, which is lead by Cameron Dunkin, who, after building their records early on in various club shows throughout America, needed a bigger stage for his dynamic duo.

"It's been great for Brandun and 'Boots' (Ennis)," said Dunkin, who added that welterweight Brian Norman will soon be following in their footsteps. "It's an opportunity when these kids get around 10, 11, 12-0 to get them out there on TV. It's a great opportunity for the kids, and if they get beyond that, then they can fight much bigger fights. *ShoBox* is great; it gives young kids a chance to get exposure."

On March 10, the 22-year-old Lee was matched with what many believed to be his sternest test: the usually durable Samuel Teah (who had never been stopped in 21 pro bouts). Lee scored a highlight-reel third-round knockout and is now considered a blue-chip commodity.

"He showed that he does have the skill to beat the better fighters," said an impressed Hall. "That was clearly his toughest test to date. I'm always going to try to make our prospects have a test."

Soon, Lee could be on to the next phase of his career and join the list of 84 world titleholders that have cut their teeth on *ShoBox*.

ShoBox has stood the test of time and shown its value to the boxing industry.

"If I have anything to do with this series in helping young fighters go on to the next level, to become a contender, to have a title opportunity, to win a title, I'll be as happy as they are about it, because the people involved in the series, we take a lot of pride in what we do on this show," said Hall.

"I get emotional about it because I do care that what we're doing is not only helpful for the sport of boxing but also for the fighters."

SHOWTIME BOXING; ENNIS: EDWARD DILLER

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UNSUNG HEROES

MANY *SHOBOX* ALUMNI HAVE GONE ON TO WIN WORLD TITLES, MANY HAVE NOT, BUT HERE'S TO THOSE WHO NEVER GOT THE COVETED BELT YET ALWAYS MADE FOR GOOD FIGHTS

By **Bernard Fernandez**

The fight epitomized the series ethos of *ShoBox: The New Generation*, which was not yet three and a half years old, even though neither the winner nor loser of the wildly entertaining and dramatic lightweight bout went on to establish himself as an attraction or major player in the 135-pound division.

On December 17, 2004, at the Chumash Casino in Santa Ynez, California, Ebo "The X-treme Machine" Elder and Courtney Burton squared off for the mostly insignificant NABO title. But the intensity of the two-way action and valor of the participants was such that broadcaster Nick Charles was moved to exclaim, "Wow, what a finish!" when Elder, his face battered and lopsided (he fought much of the bout with a broken jaw), registered two 12th-round knockdowns to secure the hard-earned TKO victory that represented an early Christmas present for on-site attendees and the at-home television audience.

But, in another sense, Elder and Burton – who entered the ring that night with a combined record of 42-3, with 24 KOs – came up a bit short of fulfilling the mission of the unique series whose stated purpose was, after all, to showcase future ring greats who would eventually emerge from their developmental cocoons like magnificent butterflies. Neither Elder nor Burton, good fighters that they were, ever ascended to a shot at a widely recognized world championship, thus each was denied the opportunity to join the list of ShoBox "graduates" that did earn that distinction, a group that to date includes 82 members, with more sure to follow.

Elder is 42 now and more at peace than might be expected of a retired fighter who came ever so close to fulfilling the destiny he once thought he might have fashioned with his will and his skill in the ring. He fought just twice more after his epic confrontation with Burton, losing both inside the distance. When his promised reward for the scintillating victory over Burton – a shot at undefeated, undisputed lightweight champion Juan Diaz – failed to materialize when Diaz pulled out with what was described as an injury sustained in a sparring session, Elder moved on to a clash with No. 1 contender Lakva Sim in a WBA lightweight eliminator and was stopped in the 12th round. He decided to hang up his gloves after his next and final bout, a fourth-round TKO loss to Michael Stewart.

"Those losses, in a way, turned out to be the best thing that ever happened to me," said Elder, a feisty southpaw who would go on to found Reality Ministries and author a book, *The Great Comeback*, which details his life before, during and after boxing in "coming back from abuse, depression, divorce and defeat to find victory, freedom and an amazing life."

"I was on *ShoBox* twice (the other a five-round technical decision over Dagoberto Najera on September 29, 2001) and I don't know any fighter who ever had anything close to my fight with Burton," he said when contacted for this story. "I know I will never forget that night. I don't think anybody who was there or saw the fight on television will forget it, either.

"I was in New York City a couple of years ago and got together with Gordon Hall (*ShoBox*'s executive producer) and Steve Farhood for breakfast. They walked into the restaurant wearing the 'Ebo Tribe' jerseys that we gave them some 14 years earlier. I couldn't believe it. They just couldn't say enough about my fight with Burton and how much it meant to them. It was really a special moment for me to find out the impact that night had on so many people."

(Top left to bottom right) Chris Arreola, Sechew Powell, Rocky Juarez, Allan Green, Raul Martinez, Andre Dirrell.

A LIST OF THE 82 BOXERS WHO appeared on ShoBox but did NOT go on to win a world title. These fighters fell short of winning a coveted major world title, but they always made for good fights and epitomized the series ethos. — Compiled by Steve Farhood

Mike Arnaoutis • Rocky Juarez • Emmanuel Lucero • Zahir Raheem • William Abeylan • Mohammed Abdullaev • Gerardo Espinoza • Rico Hoye • Jameel McCline • Al Seeger • Glenn Donaire • Randy Griffin • Epifanio Mendoza • Gary Lockett • Mario Santiago • Fulgencio Zuniga • Delvin Rodriguez •

Hall and Farhood, a former Editor-in-Chief of The Ring, have been along for the entirety of *ShoBox*'s two-decade ride, as have producer Rich Gaughan and director Rick Phillips. Their memories of the many up-and-coming prospects to have appeared during the series' run are as deeply imprinted by the tales of the near-misses like Elder as of the world champions whose successes on larger stages were largely forged in the foundry of 50/50 fights in the formative stages of their careers.

"When you're a smaller promoter and get your guy to 12-0 or 13-0, now you have to get him exposure. But where? And how?" said Vito Mielnicki of GH3 Promotions, which has put several of its prospects into *ShoBox* fights that, on paper and often in reality, could go either way. "If you don't have [a deal with a network], you go to *ShoBox* because that's the platform you can put him on, because it's all about equal opportunity. That's great, but it also comes with the realization you have to put him in tough.

"The big promoters who have their own platforms don't have to put their best prospects in tough that soon. They can baby them, slow-walk them to 22-0 or 23-0. They're probably at the same stage as our guy who might only be 12-0 or 13-0. He's stepping up because he has no choice other than to step up, because who's going to see him on national television if he doesn't? There's pros and cons to it. The con, of course, is that your guy can lose and maybe takes a step back."

And the flipside of that coin?

"If your guy wins, of course that's a plus," Mielnicki said. "I had Antoine Douglas. I had Jerry Odom, Adam Lopez and Thomas Mattice. They all got to be world-rated; two of them, Douglas and Lopez, fought in eliminators. They just didn't make the cut. If you keep putting guys in heavy, something eventually will go wrong."

It is the chance that something will go very right, however, that keeps smaller promoters such as GH3 Promotions, Tony Holden, Marshall Kauffman and Dmitry Salita, among others, bringing their better young fighters back to *ShoBox*, which represents their best opportunity to eventually cash a golden lottery ticket.

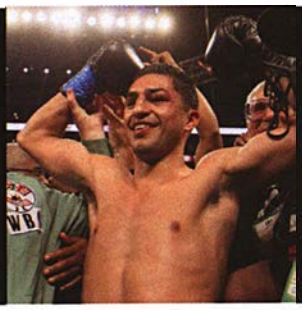
"*ShoBox* is a beautiful platform," said Mielnicki. "I think it's done amazing things. It puts real fights on. I always had great fights on ShoBox because Gordon Hall and I have the same mentality: If your guys can't win now, they can't win later. If your guy wants to be great, he has to dare to be great by fighting other top prospects. And that's what Gordon does."

Avtandil Khurtsidze never made it to a world title, but he was too much for Antoine Douglas.

One of Mielnicki's fighters, San Antonio-based featherweight Adam "Mantequilla" Lopez, holds a ShoBox record that is not apt to be broken any time soon: His eight appearances in the series are the most of any fighter, with room to spare. Lopez won the first three of those eight bouts, but was 0-3-2 thereafter, the most recent outing being against *ShoBox* newbie Ra'eese Aleem, resulting in a fourth-round stoppage loss on February 14, 2020, at the 2300 Arena in Philadelphia.

In boxing, as in life, the line delineating victory from defeat, exultation from anguish, can be

Armando Guerrero • Rogers Mtagwa • Yusaf Mack • Koba Gogoladze • Steven Foster Jr. • Miguel Espino • Michael Jennings • Darnell Wilson • Sechew Powell • Irving Garcia • Allan Green • Joel Julio • Raul Martinez • Andre Dirrell • Ronald Hearns • Enrique Ornelas • Eddie Chambers • Chris Arreola • Kevin Johnson • Giovanni Lorenzo • Harry Joe Yorgey • Freddy Hernandez



• Lenny Zappavigna • Hercules Kyvelos • Wayne McCullough • Cedric Boswell • Jesse Feliciano • Jean Paul Mendy • Billy Lyell • Josesito Lopez • Edgar Santana • Fernando Guerrero • Orlando Cruz • Marvin Quintero • John Molina

sharply drawn. In praising Aleem's performance, Farhood said, "Hey, this was his big debut. He really didn't have that many major fights before he defeated a fighter named Marcus Bates, who was 8-0. But before that, he had not really been tested. He has a nice set of tools."

So nice, in fact, that Aleem, who is promoted by Kauffman, moved on from Lopez to a step-up bout on SHOWTIME CHAMPIONSHIP BOXING, in which he again bested Bates in a WBA eliminator on a 10th-round TKO, then to a date with Vic Pasillas for the WBA interim junior featherweight title. He won that one, too, on an 11th-round stoppage, also on SHOWTIME CHAMPIONSHIP BOXING.

"The thing about Gordon is he's not going to give me or anyone else a 60/40 fight, for or against me, or even a 55/45 fight," Kauffman said. "What Gordon always looks for is 50/50 fights or as close to that as he can possibly get. It can be a situation where you think the risk can outweigh the reward sometimes, unless your guy wins. But if he does win, the benefits can be pretty obvious. My kid Aleem (now 18-0, with 12 KOs) went from fighting on *ShoBox* for the first time to being the interim world champion in two fights. That turned out to be a heck of a lot better reward than it was a risk."

That is not necessarily so with Lopez (19-4-2, 9 KOs), who hasn't fought since his loss to Aleem and, at 30, is said to be pondering his future in boxing. He did not return several calls for his thoughts on his many *ShoBox* experiences.

"I don't see him the same, like in the past," *ShoBox* commentator Raul Marquez said of what he had observed of Lopez that cold night in Philly.

Mielnicki has his own thoughts on the matter, and he said he thinks he knows what Lopez would say. His guy had dared to be great, time and again, and what more can anyone expect than that?

"Of course it was positive," he said of Lopez's repeated trials by fire on *ShoBox* telecasts. "Nobody would have known about Adam Lopez if it hadn't been for ShoBox. Look, he had a beautiful career. He just came up a little short."

Holden, best known as the promoter of the late Tommy Morrison, who was 43 when he died on September 1, 2013, 17 years after his announcement that he was HIV-positive, has his own prime example of a *ShoBox* success story. But, like Mielnicki and other promoters, he understands that Gordon Hall's first and foremost priority is making the best matches possible, regardless of any personal relationships he might have within the boxing industry.

"*ShoBox* usually doesn't have guys that are 25-0," Holden said. "It's really about up-and-coming fighters fighting each other. For a lot of 10-0 kids, they're probably going to be on undercard fights off-television. On *ShoBox*, some of those kids could be in the main event, even if they're fighting somebody of comparable skill and with the same kind of record. Gordon Hall is a master of that.

"Look, Gordon is a friend of mine, but friendship stops immediately if you try to get a softer touch for one of your kids. Gordon doesn't care who you are or what kind of relationship you have with somebody, he's going to put on the best fights no matter what. He plays no favorites. I have so much respect for him for that."

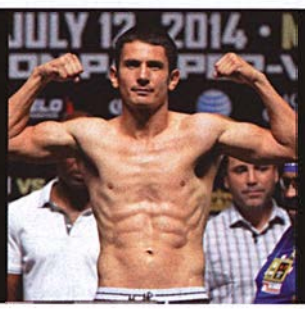
It was Ivan "The Beast" Baranchyk who became Holden's unlikely drawing card in *ShoBox*-televised fights at the Buffalo Run Casino in Miami, Oklahoma, which took to the Belarusian-born Russian transplant to that out-of-the-way town as if he were a bull-riding champion cowboy or a Heisman Trophy quarterback.

"We put him on *ShoBox* in Miami, where Ivan had made his home," said Holden, an Oklahoma native. "I made him, and a couple of other kids, like the franchise fighters in that market. Ivan developed such a following that whenever *ShoBox* came, we had a full house of screaming fans holding signs. Ivan came out of a cage, which is something SHOWTIME never allowed before.

"What that kind of exposure did was to launch Ivan into a world title fight, and he became a (IBF junior welterweight) world champion. If it hadn't been for ShoBox, he never would have had the platform to get there."

Baranchyk – his fifth-round knockout loss to Jose Zepeda on October 3, 2020, at Las Vegas' MGM Grand, a classic slugfest in which both participants went down four times and was named The Ring's Fight of the Year – is one of the 84 *ShoBox* alumni who made it all the way to the top of the mountain. But it is the unsung heroes, the Elders and the Lopezes and so many others who gave as much of themselves as they possibly could – that also deserve recognition. SHO

Jr. • Edison Miranda • Chris Avalos • Giovanni Caro • Martin Honorio • Mauricio Herrera • Carlos Ivan Velasquez • Osumanu Adama • Edwin Rodriguez • Mike Jones



• Sharif Bogere • Diego Magdaleno • Thomas Dulorme • Manuel Roman • Dierry Jean • John Thompson • Dominic Wade • Hank Lundy • Rogelio Medina • Dominic Breazeale • Eric Hunter • Antonio Nieves • Alex Santiago • Radivoje Kalajdic • Constantin Bejenaru • Abel Ramos • Lenin Castillo • Andrew Tabiti • Yuandale Evans • Ruben Villa • Thomas LaManna

THE FUTURE

UP-AND-COMING FIGHTERS ARE THE LIFEBLOOD OF *SHOBOX*, AND THERE'S NO SHORTAGE OF WOULD-BE CHAMPIONS IN THE PIPELINE

By **Ryan Songalia**

After his first 10-round bout, Janelson Figueroa Bocachica emerged bruised and swollen but still unbeaten.

Both he and Mark Reyes Jr. entered the ring with perfect records for their *ShoBox: The New Generation* main event in February. Both had hit and been hit, with the taller, flashier Bocachica having to adjust to the counterpunching Reyes. It was a firefight, with both men tempting fate in free-swinging exchanges. But in the end, Bocachica did enough to walk out of Mohegan Sun Casino with a majority decision victory and his '0' intact.

It was the kind of performance that answers old questions while raising new ones. It was the kind of fight that made *ShoBox* a vital checkpoint for upstarts looking to prove they were more than not-yet-ready-for-primetime players.

"It could have gone either way, but to me that almost epitomized what *ShoBox* is about, because both of them got tested way tougher than they'd ever been tested," said *ShoBox* commentator Steve Farhood. "And really there was no loser in the fight, because Mark Reyes fought so well. So what that he didn't get the decision? Both fighters now have serious futures and I'm sure we'll see both of them again."

Bocachica's manager, David McWater, says he couldn't believe his luck when *ShoBox* Executive Producer Gordon Hall pitched the Reyes matchup to them. He soon realized that Hall had done his homework.

"I could have sworn to you we were a 4 or 5-1 favorite on that. Walking out, I felt like we were a 3-2 favorite," said McWater, who has had many of his fighters face their first big tests on the show. "It was pretty typical of *ShoBox*. No matter how big I have the advantage, it's always a lot closer."

(Top to bottom) Undefeated prospects/contenders Ra'eese Aleem, Richardson Hitchins, Xavier Martinez and Isaac Cruz.

Hardcore fans got their first look at future WBC lightweight titleholder Devin Haney on *ShoBox*.

Janelson Bocachica blasted Nicklaus Flaz (pictured) in one round but barely got past crafty Mark Reyes Jr. four months later.

Winning in a *ShoBox* main event was a big step up for Bocachica (17-0, 11 knockouts), a welterweight from Detroit who had never fought on national TV until his previous fight, four months earlier. That night, he dropped Nicklaus Flaz less than 30 seconds into the fight and scored a first-round knockout. The experience was over before it started, but he still got a taste of what's to come at the higher levels of the sport.

Bocachica's co-promoter, Dmitriy Salita, says the "diminished" replica of what a big fight atmosphere is like is vital to a fighter's development, like the fighter meetings with television commentators and the pre-fight photo shoots.

"I see this on different levels: [In] the gym, guys are Roy Jones and Floyd Mayweather … [but] when it's time to walk

to the ring, they fold," said Salita.

Prospects like Bocachica or junior welterweight Brandun Lee or super middleweight Vladimir Shishkin don't have the machines behind them that fighters under major promotional banners like Top Rank have, so *ShoBox* becomes the proving ground on which to get noticed.

"As a whole, they're just as promising as any group we've had," said Farhood of the current crop of *ShoBox* fighters. Of the recent graduates, he mentions four who have moved on to the higher budgets of SHOWTIME CHAMPIONSHIP BOXING who have "future champion" written all over them: Ra'eese Saleem, Richardson Hitchins, Xavier Martinez and Isaac Cruz. "So when you combine them with Brandun Lee and Bocachica, I think you have a very strong roster of future champs."

What are the indicators that an interested observer looks for in assessing future success? For Farhood, he looks for whether the fighters are able to exceed expectations each time they step up, which is something he has noted with recent *ShoBox* grads Devin Haney and Jaron "Boots" Ennis.

"When they have that poise at that young age before they've really even proven themselves, that sticks out ... That is going to lead to a lot of success in the future," said Farhood.

For Ennis, a stance-switching welterweight from Philadelphia, it was one moment in his *ShoBox* debut in July 2018 that made an immediate impression on fans. Toward the end of the second round, Ennis made Armando Alvarez miss four straight punches and then froze in a no-look pose before stepping off to evade more punches.

"Next thing you know, it was all over Instagram," said Ennis (27-0, 25 KOs), who knocked Alvarez down four times the following round for the stoppage win. "A couple days later, I went to the mall and people were noticing me and they said, 'You're the guy who did that move on SHOWTIME.'"

Charles Conwell is one to watch in the 154-pound division.

Ennis, whose older brothers Farah and Derek both fought on *ShoBox*, was back on the program less than four months later, once again showing his seamless transition between offense and defense in taking apart Raymond Serrano in two rounds. Ennis has since stamped himself as a top contender with a one-sided domination of former titleholder Sergey Lipinets in April.

Ennis knows that there have been 84 fighters who have appeared on *ShoBox* that have won world titles, and he says he's ready to join that list as soon as his next outing.

"I'll be the 85th then," said Ennis.

Haney, who now holds the WBC lightweight title, is one recent alum who also knew how to make an impression in his *ShoBox* debut. Facing Mason Menard in May 2018, Haney broke out an Iverson-esque crossover move to land power punches on his more experienced foe. In the end, Menard's corner was forced to pull their fighter out before the 10th and final round, giving Haney the stoppage victory. "I'm definitely the next superstar. There's only bigger and better things from here on out," said Haney. After that performance, few could argue against it.

Charles Conwell, a 2016 U.S. Olympian, would have fought on up to four *ShoBox* cards in 2020 if not for the pandemic, says McWater, his manager. Conwell made it to the SHOWTIME airwaves the same way many others had, impressing on undercards before getting tapped to appear on the broadcast. His first *ShoBox* appearance was in 2017, when he scored three knockdowns in a shutout decision win over Roque Zapata in his hometown of Cleveland. He wouldn't fight on *ShoBox* again until October 2020, when he reemerged on the world stage a year after his ill-fated fight against Patrick Day, who tragically passed away due to his injuries. Facing Wendy Toussaint, a fellow undefeated

prospect, Conwell officially graduated to the next level with a comprehensive ninth-round knockout win that was punctuated by an uppercut that broke Toussaint's nose.

"That was another stepping stone to like, '[He's] not just your average fighter,'" said Conwell. "'He's beating these other prospects, so he's a level above prospects. He's a contender. He's separating himself from everyone else.'"

McWater feels that Conwell, who is promoted by DiBella, is "less than five fights, and maybe as little as two or three" away from fighting for a world title.

In terms of the current roster, it's hard to match Brandun Lee for excitement. The 22-year-old from La Quinta, California, has won 13 straight by knockout, including all three of his *ShoBox* outings. His debut, a third-round stoppage of Camilo Prieto in the last card before the pandemic shut down the sport for several months, hinted at the all-action approach he brings to the ring, but it was his lights-out knockout of Samuel Teah this past March that opened eyes at ringside. Teah had never been knocked out before he ran into a single counter right from Lee in the third round.

"A really neat, 10-round dominant boxing victory is great, and for a lot of fighters that's how they win," said Farhood. "But when you knock somebody out the way that Brandun Lee's been knocking people out, that's special."

There's no shortage of excitement from Salita's stable of Eastern European fighters, some of whom go straight from obscure cards in former Soviet states to the biggest test of their careers on national TV. That's the situation that Shohjahon Ergashev found himself in when he made his series debut against Mykal Fox in February 2019. Fox, a mobile, rangy southpaw, was perhaps the most challenging style that Ergashev (19-0, 17 KOs) could have faced to make a first impression. The 29-year-old from Uzbekistan looked for the knockout with each punch and whiffed his fair share before handing Fox his first pro defeat.

His most recent *ShoBox* outing, a first-round knockout of Adrian Estrella in January 2021, displayed far more poise, as Ergashev placed a perfect left hand to the body that left Estrella writhing in pain on the canvas for the 10-count.

"What appealed to me about [Ergashev] is that he's such a big puncher. I mean, Golovkin-like," said Salita of Ergashev, who, like Tyson Fury, is trained by SugarHill Steward.

Vladimir Shishkin (12-0, 7 KOs) made his U.S. debut on a *ShoBox* card, wearing DeAndre Ware down for an eighth-round stoppage. The Russian super middleweight had over 300 amateur fights before turning pro and has moved quickly through the pros. His last outing saw him gain a different kind of experience – a series of dangerous cuts above his left eye – as he outclassed Sena Agbeko to a unanimous decision win.

Salita says Shishkin has also been looking to make an impression on the fans outside of the ring, relocating to Detroit during the past year-plus and taking English lessons to be able to communicate better in America.

It's great to get a win, but a loss on *ShoBox* doesn't necessarily make one a pariah. Just ask the 15 fighters, like Robert Guerrero and Luis Collazo, who went on to win world titles after losing on the series.

Even in defeat, a fighter like Mark Reyes can perform well enough to be invited back to the series. But for the winner, the spotlight gets a bit brighter, as does the scrutiny. That all comes along with fighting on national television.

"Two to three *ShoBox*es from now, Janelson Bocachica, among most boxing fans, will be a household name," said McWater, confidently.

Rising super middleweight Vladimir Shishkin takes it to Sena Agbeko.

BEHIND THE MIC

THE SECRET TO THE SUCCESS OF THE *SHOBOX* TELECAST? PROFESSIONALISM, MUTUAL RESPECT, ADMIRATION AND FRIENDSHIP

By **Barry Tompkins**

Let me begin by offering the nuance of what it takes to do my job as a boxing blow-by-blow commentator. It is imperative that to perform this task at the highest level and maximum efficiency, one must know clearly and unequivocally the difference between his left hand and his right hand.

That accomplished, career success is a given.

I've been asked to try to describe what makes our little team of announcers and our little show, *ShoBox: The New Generation*, what it is and how it's managed to survive the ups, downs, and whims of network programmers for two decades.

The longevity of this series can be summed up in two words. Gordon Hall.

Part and parcel, he is the reason for not only the show's 20 year run, but for its identity, its uniqueness, its consistency in matchmaking, and its assemblage of talented people who, to the number, would give up a more financially rewarding gig or a higher profile one to do this show for this man.

Gordon is the ultimate family man. There's his wife Laura, two beautiful and talented daughters, and the entire crew of *ShoBox*. That would probably explain why Steve, Raul and I are at the "kids" table on Christmas. Gordon cares about everyone he's hired. And it's reciprocal.

The people who Gordon has assembled over the years are the engine that drives *ShoBox*. It's

(Opposite page, left to right) Steve Farhood, Barry Tompkins and Raul Marquez.

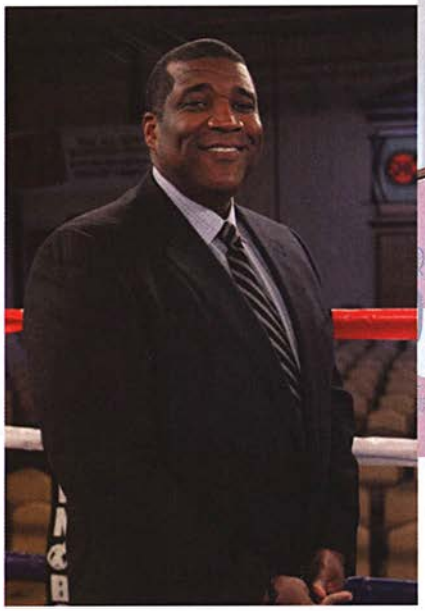
BOX
BOX

a collection of moving parts from all over the country that somehow manages to sync perfectly with both the show, and more importantly, each other.

I have taken to ending every *ShoBox* telecast with thanks to "the best crew in sports television."

There is a distinct reason for this. Our crew on *ShoBox*, in my humble and experienced view, IS the best crew in sports television. At least the best one I've worked with in 53 years of yammering about sports on television.

There is a reason. They are left to do their job without being demeaned by overzealous producers, directors and insecure management.



They are appreciated for what they do and because of that, they keep coming back. I am the "kid" when it comes to time of service on *ShoBox*, and I'm into my 10th year. Most of the crew has been around since the great Nick Charles first said, "Hello, and welcome to the first edition of *ShoBox: The New Generation*," back in 2001.

It was Nick Charles and Steve Farhood who set the on-air tone for what ShoBox was to be. And, it hasn't wavered. Our business is an incestuous one. Everybody knows everybody. You know the good guys – and you know the bad guys. Nick Charles was a good guy. And his image is forever stamped on this product that he and others created two decades ago.

When Nick passed tragically and way too soon, Curt Menefee stepped into what is now my chair, and carried the same tone that Nick had established right at the beginning. One of, "You're going to want to watch this. These are tomorrow's stars matched tougher than ever before. So, sit back and watch with us and you'll get a preview of the fighters destined for SHOWTIME CHAMPIONSHIP BOXING in months and years to come."

There is a bottom line for me in this sometimes vicious and unpredictable business that I have somehow fallen into, and managed to survive in, for more than a half century. You just have to enjoy the people you are working with. To that end, I've been blessed.

In all the years of doing virtually every sport known to man, I can honestly say I've never had a single color analyst whom I truly disliked. And that includes probably 40 or so in boxing, over 150 in basketball, 75 in football, 40 in tennis and an infinite number in other sports. Mind you, there were many I didn't care to share an adult beverage or a meal with, but nobody I truly didn't like.

And now, here I am in the home stretch of my career and I'm working with two guys whom I consider to be, not just competent at what they do, but amongst my closest friends.

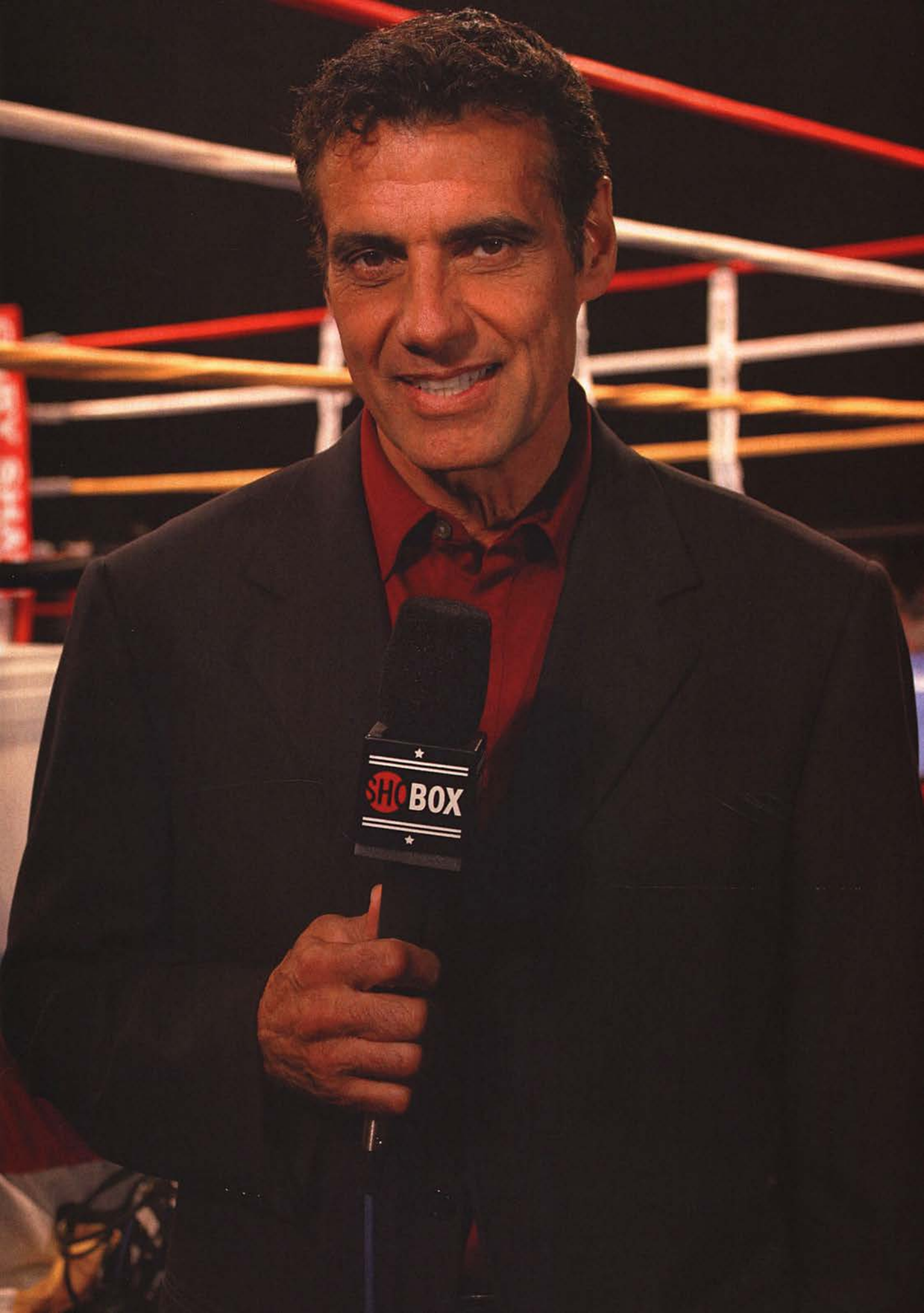
Here's a confession: I believe that the best boxing color analysts are not usually former fighters. I spent 10 years at HBO with Larry Merchant. I spent 15 years doing boxing at Fox Sports with Rich Marotta. I spent eight years at ESPN doing Top Rank Boxing with Al Bernstein. And now here I am in my 10th year at Showtime, doing boxing with Steve Farhood. In my opinion, they are the best color analysts I've ever had.

Curt Menefee continued the professional tone set by Nick Charles (opposite page). Barry Tompkins speaks about his induction during the IBHOF induction Weekend of Champions event (above).

Which brings me to the third member of our broadcast team on this ShoBox series, Raul Marquez.

I've known Raul since before he became an Olympian, turned professional and ultimately won a championship. He has, in my opinion, become as proficient in the broadcast industry as he was as a fighter. It's 100% because he, and only a handful of others, has worked as hard at perfecting his craft on the microphone as he did in the boxing ring.

Raul has a first-person perspective


SHOBOX

MCGREGOR
SPORTS & ENTERTAINMENT
SHOWTIME
MAYWEATHER
PROMOTIONS
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Extra

of the game and brings an element to our show that Steve and I can't. And moreover, he can do it in terms that the average viewer can understand.

Working with Steve Farhood alongside me makes my job almost too easy. Our philosophy on *ShoBox* is, three guys sitting on a bar stool watching and talking about a fight. As a play-by-play person I think of myself as something of the quarterback. Take the snap and hand the ball off. With people like Steve and Raul, it's easy. With others, you hand it off and you're never quite sure if it's coming back.

Many years ago, I did a nightly local news show that the anchorman and I used to facetiously call "I've Got a Secret." The way we saw it was that the producer had a secret, and it was our job to find out what it might be sometime between the start and the end of the show, and preferably before the studio walls came crashing down on us. The communication between the control room and us on the set would have been more efficient if it were two tin cans and a string. You just never knew what was coming next. The producer's comment at show's end was inevitably, "Good show." Ours was, "Got time for a drink?"

Rich Gaughn has been the *ShoBox* producer from the beginning. Rick Phillips has been alongside him as our director for the same length of time. We all talk a week or so before the show. We do the same at our fighter and production meetings the week of. We talk again on show day. There are no secrets. When the red light goes on at the top of the show, I know I don't have to do anybody's job except my own. Steve feels the same. So does Raul. At the end of these shows, talent, producer and director and, of course, Gordon Hall, generally mutually say, "Good show." (Or, in rare cases, "Not so good show.") We also mutually say, "Got time for a drink?" But this time it's because we enjoy working together AND we enjoy each other's company. There are no "secrets" on *ShoBox*.

Sitting next to Steve Farhood is like sitting next to a boxing encyclopedia. Steve not only remembers every fighter who has appeared on our show for the past two decades, he remembers who he beat, how he beat him, and probably his mother's maiden name. I, on the other hand, can't remember what I had for lunch.

Raul brings that fighter's knowledge of how a punch feels, both on the giving and receiving end. He understands nuance and can explain it in lay terms.

My role is to describe what might be going on in the ring. I am highly qualified to do this. Remember, I have unwavering knowledge of which is left, and which is right. So, I can say with absolute certainty, "That was a good left hand," or "That was a big right hand." That, and remembering what I had for lunch, pretty much sums up my job.

Our boss, Stephen Espinoza, the President of SHOWTIME Sports, once succinctly described that what makes *ShoBox* the unique product that it is. One day, sitting in Gordon Hall's office and bemoaning the fact that we seem to be the red-headed stepchild of SHOWTIME, Stephen stuck his head in the door and said, "You know, the thing about *ShoBox* is that it's the one thing on my plate that I never have to worry about. It's a great product, run by great people, and I can just sit back and simply watch it, and enjoy it, like everybody else. It doesn't need me to interfere."

With that in mind, off we go into our third decade. Showcasing tomorrow's champions. Separating the contenders from the pretenders. Providing a unique and defined niche in this most basic of all sports.

Of course it is. All you have to know is your left from your right.

(Left to right) Stephen Espinoza, Antonio Tarver, Mauro Ranallo and Al Bernstein.

BRYAN STEFFY

IN MEMORIAM

JAY LARKIN AND **NICK CHARLES** ARE NO LONGER WITH US, BUT THE LEGACIES OF THE BELOVED DUO ENDURE. ***SHOBOX*** WOULD NOT EXIST WITHOUT THEIR INNOVATION, INTEGRITY AND PASSION

By **Ron Borges**

There may have never been a more unlikely combination in boxing than Jay Larkin and Nick Charles. There haven't been many more successful ones, either.

Larkin and promoter Gary Shaw came up with the idea for *ShoBox: The New Generation*, in 2001, a show meant to do what wasn't being done often enough in boxing. Rather than broadcast well established fighters, it was designed to showcase up-and-coming talent whose skills often exceed their notoriety. Not surprisingly, considering his own path toward boxing, Larkin made an unexpected choice for the voice of the show.

Nick Charles had been the longtime co-anchor of CNN's Sports Tonight and a reporter often found along ringside at major fights. He was the first sports anchor CNN hired in 1980 and three times was named the sexiest sportscaster in America. The only problem was Charles had never called a boxing match until Larkin paired him with longtime boxing journalist Steve Farhood for the first *ShoBox* telecast 20 years ago. It was a hit in large measure because Charles was one of the best prepared announcers ever to sit at ringside and someone who had an unfailing understanding of what was at stake for the fighters in front of him.

Charles once said of *ShoBox*, "In this series, people's careers have either taken off or ended. We know little about these guys except that they better have a blazing desire to succeed. The fighters have no entourages. We don't do ring walks. It's just boxing where two guys are matched tough and it's a question of who moves forward and who falls back. That's the central them of every *ShoBox* fight."

Jay Larkin

Charles presented the tension of such high wire acts with compassion, enthusiasm and knowledge right to the moment he was suddenly diagnosed with cancer in 2009 and forced to leave Showtime. He passed away two years later. By that time, Larkin too was gone, a victim of brain cancer in 2010. That Larkin had made a non-traditional choice in Charles came as no surprise because his ascension from junior publicist to Senior Vice-President and executive producer of SHOWTIME CHAMPIONSHIP BOXING was equally unconventional.

Larkin had been a theatre major in college and was once a dancer in a West End production of "Hair" in New York before he came to SHOWTIME in 1984. Two years later his association with boxing began when a SHOWTIME executive named Fred Schneier turned to him before SHOWTIME'S first-ever boxing show, a card featuring middleweight champion Marvin Hagler vs. John Mugabi, and asked who the elderly man near him was. Larkin told him it was former light heavyweight champion Billy Conn but that was only the beginning of the story he loved to tell.

"On the spot, I became the head of SHOWTIME BOXING," Larkin used to say. "The truth was I wouldn't have known Billy Conn if he punched me in the face. Somebody had told me who he was. I didn't know the difference between the IBF and the FBI...but I was a guy who had timing."

He also had a tremendous sense of humor and an eye for how to compete against an opponent with a far bigger budget. In those years, HBO Sports was the 800-pound gorilla of televised boxing. There was no fight it couldn't get if it wanted it. Yet Larkin forged alliances with promoters Don King in the U.S. and Frank Warren in England and through them landed broadcast deals with Mike Tyson, Evander Holyfield, Julio Cesar Chavez and others that gave SHOWTIME some of the biggest fights in boxing during the nearly 20 years he was running its boxing franchise.

"I became a close friend with Jay," recalled former HBO Sports executive Lou DiBella. "We were civil competitors who enjoyed each other's company. Jay had a passion for ballet and the arts. I had a love of entertainment. We talked more about that than boxing.

"We both felt we had little to gain being competitors so we talked weekly about our schedules and how to avoid putting shows on each other's dates. We horse traded. We both realized HBO's dominance but Jay did a tremendous job keeping SHOWTIME competitive and relevant. He did a really good job maintaining a level of excellence there under difficult circumstances. In a sport not always known for this, Jay was an honorable man."

He was also an inventive one. Perhaps because he was forced to think outside the box to keep SHOWTIME competitive against a broadcasting opponent with superior size, reach and market power, he came up with the *ShoBox: The New*

Generation to fill a role that sadly missing in boxing broadcasting.

By the time his tenure at SHOWTIME ended in 2005 in the midst of a corporate shakeup, Larkin had televised some of the biggest fights in boxing history, including the two Tyson-Evander Holyfield fights as well as major events with Chavez, Felix Trinidad and others. Perhaps his greatest work however came in 2002 when he brokered a joint television deal with HBO to stage the Lennox Lewis-Mike Tyson heavyweight title fight in Memphis.

At the time, SHOWTIME held an exclusive contract with Tyson and HBO had the same arrangement with Lewis. Larkin convinced executives at both cable networks to agree to a joint pay-per-view arrangement that allowed what became at the time the highest grossing fight in televised boxing history.

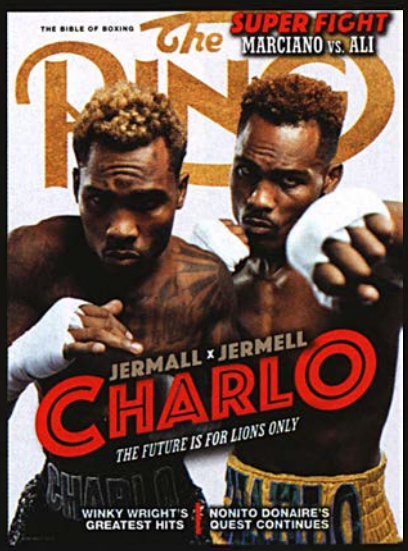
ShoBox: The New Generation was not Larkin's only creative moment. Understanding the difficulty of battling HBO's massive budget, Larkin began to steer his network away from multi-fight deals for single events, a plan he called "great fights, no rights," meaning SHOWTIME would have no long-term stake in the participants.

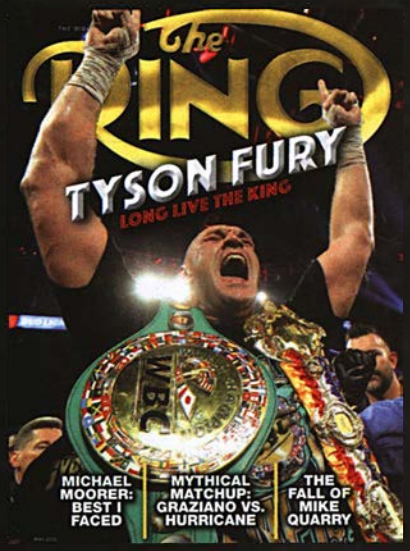
It was, like *ShoBox*, the kind of innovation that could only spring from the mind of someone who came at boxing not from the traditionalist's point of view but from that of a lover of the larger world of arts and entertainment. Larkin viewed boxing as a sport of passionate confrontation but also as an art form that would benefit from new vision.

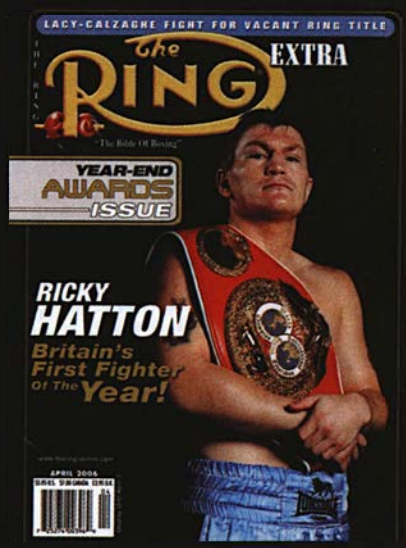
Creating *ShoBox: The New Generation*, and making Nick Charles, the sexiest sportscaster in America but also one of the most humble, its voice were two strokes of genius from a guy smart enough to find out who Billy Conn was before anyone asked and turn that knowledge into a 20-year run as the mastermind of SHOWTIME boxing.

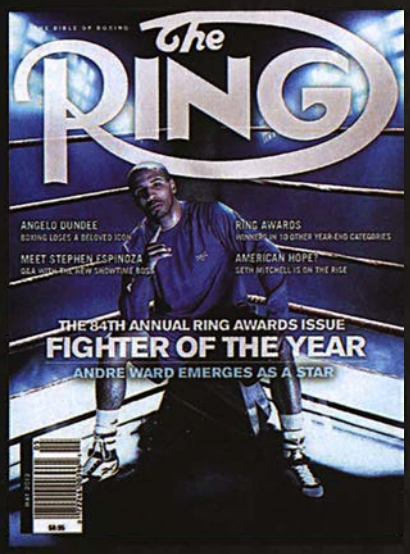
FROM THE ARCHIVES

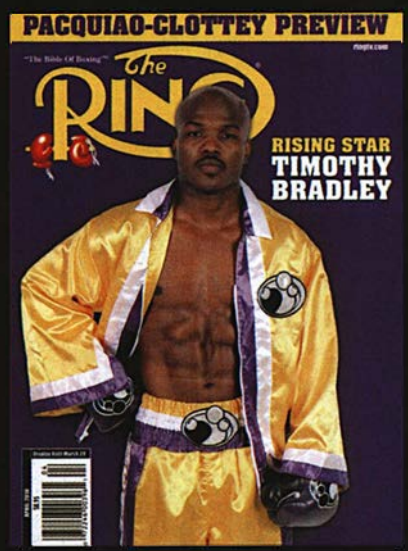
COVER STARS: More than 80 *ShoBox* graduates went on to win world titles, but the accomplishments and charisma of a select few earned them the coveted front of Ring Magazine.



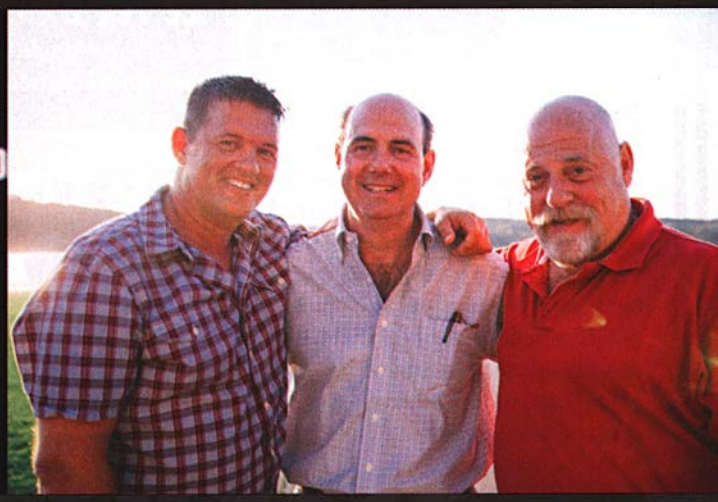








Steve Farhood



THE BIG THREE
Richard Gaughan, Gordon Hall, Rick Phillips

Dave Saretsky, Fred Domenigoni, Scott Snell, Paul Tartar, Matt Donovan, Tom Treiber, Dave Lilling, Gordon Hall, Joie Silva, Nick Charles, Richard Gaughan, Antonio Tarver, Kevin White, Gene Samuels, Steve Farhood, Kevin Rose, Rick Phillips, Michael Samuels

Gordon Hall, Raul Marquez, Barry Tompkins, Steve Farhood, Rick Phillips, Richard Gaughan

HAPPY HOLIDAYS FOR SHOBOX

SEASON BEATINGS FROM THE SHOBOX CREW

Top Row- Paul Tartar, Raul Marquez, Gordon Hall, Phil Adler, Rick Phillips, Rick Tugman, Steve Farhood, Dave Lilling, FLO, Barry Tompkins, Jim Townsend, Joe Jacovino, Matt Donovan; Bottom Row- Jim Ferrera, Gene Samuels, Nikki Ferry, Kevin White, Jason Waufle, Joie Silva, Richard Gaughan

Gordon Hall received the BWAA Sam Taub Award

FATHER SON SHOBOX
Michael Samuels, Gene Samuels, Joe McSorley, Ian McSorley, Joe Jacovino, Joey Jacovino

Nick Charles, Gordon Hall, Richard Gaughan, Antonio Tarver, Rick Phillips, Steve Farhood

Top row- Raul Marquez, Rick Phillips, Gordon Hall, Richard Gaughan, Barry Tompkins, Steve Farhood; Bottom Row- Joe Jacovino, Nikki Ferry, Joie Silva

Joe Jacovino, Dave Lilling, Chris Legentil, Steve Farhood, Brian Kahn, Gordon Hall, Richard Gaughan, Rick Phillips, Curt Menefee, David Dinkins, Jr. , Paul Tartar, Al Bernstein; Seated- Tom Casino, Joie Silva

Tom Casino, Nick Charles

BELLATOR MMA

ON SHOWTIME

RULE WHERE WARRIORS

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Cheers to

20 years

from